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"THE RANCH RAIDERS," "OLD ROCKY'S
BOYEES," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

HEARING HER DESTINY.

It is at least two hundred miles, in a direct line, from El Paso del Norte to Presidio del Norte.

Both towns are situated on the Rio Grande, and on the Mexican side of the river.

Across the Rio Grande from Presidio del

Norte, and but a short distance from the stream, is Fort Leaton. This military post being in Texas, Horsehead Hills are east of the fort, and some thirty miles distant, Cibolo Creek flowing southward, between the military post mentioned and the adjacent mountainous region. On either side of the Concha river and Cibolo Creek, both of which empty into the Bravo and near each other, are fine grazing plains, which extend far beyond the timber lines that border the streams.

The undergrowth throughout the timber is dense and thorny, and impenetrable except by paths formed by wild beasts. Here the *cacti* family thrive in richest luxuriance, their beautiful blossoms glaring like tongues of flame amid the gloom; and, even out in the more barren and rocky region, thriving where all except the toughest wire grass withers and dies beneath the hot sun.

At the time of which we write—which was just previous to the Civil War—there was but a small detachment of troops stationed at Fort Leaton, as the garrison had been weakened by an order from the commanding officer of that district for all accept a detail of twenty men to report at head-quarters, Fort Davis, to repel or intercept a large war party of Apaches under the notorious and much dreaded Lone Wolf, who was making ready for an extensive raid over the Rio Pecos, and down upon the Texan border settlements.

But, as there had not for some length of time been any raids of Mexican bandits into Presidio county, little danger was apprehended from that quarter; and the few soldiers left at Fort Leaton were deemed sufficient to defend the ranches on the American side of the river, which were, at that time, few and far between.

There were a few Americans, who resided near the fort, on the Rio Grande, and who maintained quite a trade with the Mexicans beyond the river; and there were also quite a number of Mexicans, whose homes were on the Texas side of the Rio Bravo. Texan settlers, too, were on both sides of the Cibolo Creek, some living ten miles and more from the point at which this stream poured its waters into the Rio Grande.

The land on the Concha river, on the Mexican side, extending for many miles over the east and west plains, was owned by Don Juan de Casas, a wealthy old Castilian, whose *peons* and vast herds of cattle, sheep, and horses, were so numerous that he himself could not, with any certainty, make an estimate of them. He was, in fact, one of the wealthiest *hacienda*'s in the whole state of Chihuahua, ruling king-like over his slaves, many of whom had fled his domains to become bandits in the mountains, or else to freedom and safety in Texas, for he was of a most brutal nature, and cruel and vengeful in the extreme.

Don Juan was a widower, with but one child, a daughter, who was but fourteen years of age at the time our narrative opens. Yet Anita de Casas was as mature physically as are most American girls, four and five years her senior. Indeed, many maidens in Montezuma land marry before reaching the age of Don Juan's pretty daughter.

The *hacienda* of the old Don was situated some three miles up the river from Presidio del Norte, a distance of no consideration whatever in that section, where every one mounts a horse and rides at a gallop even when but a hundred yards are to be traveled. The house was but one story in height, built of *adobe*, or sun-dried brick; the walls three feet in thickness, and extending the same distance above the flat roof, thus forming breastworks. The water, when rain fell, was carried off the roof by wooden spouts which projected two feet from the walls, as is customary in Mexico.

The building formed three sides of a square, the fourth being a huge wall, with stout oaken gates the top of the wall being covered with a thick growth of prickly pear, planted there to prevent would-be intruders from scaling it. In this way, an extensive *patio*, or court-yard, was formed, the windows of the dwelling looking out into the same, and a dead unbroken wall being all that could be seen from the outside. Thus the inmates were obliged to go upon the roof, to gain a view of the plain in front, or of the bottom-timber in the rear.

The court was smooth and even, its floor of clay baked by the sun being as hard almost as the walls of the dwelling. The floors of the interior were of the same, but were plentifully strewn with skins and mats. In the middle of the rear side of the dwelling was an entrance, which was furnished with double doors, kept locked.

Altogether, the Hacienda del Concha, as the old Don called his home, had been erected with a view of defense, both against lawless Mexicans and marauding Apaches. It had the usual extensive corrals, along the border of the timber, both up and down the river, and there was also a well-kept garden between the timber and the dwelling.

A deep lagoon extended from the river some distance into the timber, and its banks were kept in fine order as promenades, although it was but seldom that Don Juan and his fair daughter were favored with visitors and, as the old Castilian was too corpulent to indulge with any comfort in walking in the shades, the paths were used almost exclusively by the resident priest, Padre Jose, the Senorita Anita, and her duenna.

This last was an elderly maiden, sister of Don Juan de Casas.

Anita had a favorite pony, and at times went galloping over the prairies, but never without several well-mounted and armed *peons* as guards, and the *padre* as special escort.

Young in years though she was, the child of the *hacienda* was in many things a woman. In word, and song, and act, she appeared to be as gay and free as

she was willowy and quick in motion; but there were times when she seemed dreamy and contemplative, and had a far-away, dreamy look in her limpid eyes, which indicated that something was wanting to give her the full enjoyment of life—something she longed for, and yet could not define.

The mother of Anita had been of pure Castilian blood, as was the Don also; the latter taking great pride in asserting that none of his or his wife's family had ever disgraced themselves by marrying beneath them. Sooner would the haughty patrician have suffered the amputation of his right arm—*r* indeed his head, for that matter—than that his only child should wed any one except the son of some honored and wealthy family, like that to which she belonged.

It was from thoughts upon this very subject that he had, but a little time before, called Padre Jose to a consultation, which resulted in both of them not only deciding that Anita was now of a marriageable age, but that there must at once be steps taken toward selecting a suitable husband for the youthful beauty.

Both the father and the priest had observed the girl's abstracted moods, and had knowledge enough of the sex to interpret the cause.

The conference resulted in Don Juan's falling into a perfect fury, and that because he was not able to call to mind a suitable young Castilian for Anita's husband. He was angry, also, at the *padre* for being in a like predicament.

Generally speaking, the latter held great control over his wealthy patron; but, in this case, he found, much to his surprise, that he could neither reason with nor pacify him. And, while in this quandary, being eager to say or do anything that would quiet his irascible host, the priest proposed that they should make a journey to Chihuahua City for the express purpose of looking up a husband for Anita.

The old man at first growled at this proposition—being angry because it had not originated with himself—but, finally, although he was much averse to traveling, he agreed to undertake it, and that without loss of time. He again cursed himself for having been so long blind to the urgency of the case, and was furious with time for having passed so rapidly, forcing his loved child to woman's estate before he was prepared for such a change.

A further conversation, in the course of which each expressed his views plainly, was held, and then it was decided that a middle-aged man, if he came up to the mark in every way, would be more desirable than a young one, as the latter might turn out to be a gambler and dissipated, besides refusing to make his home at the *hacienda*—for Don Juan declared emphatically that he would not be parted from his only child.

Thus it was arranged between the Don and the *padre*; the former deciding that, as the case called for immediate action, he would start, as soon as preparations could be made, even denying himself the pleasure of attending the annual bull-fight, soon to come off at Presidio del Norte.

It so happened that the pair had considered it necessary to hold their consultation amid the shades of the bottom-timber; the anxious parent wallowing to that point, which was further than he had walked in years. It also happened that Anita, with her aunt, had strolled to the shades, to while away the time, just previous to their coming.

The aunt had fallen asleep in her hammock, but Anita was perusing a book when her attention was attracted by the voices of the two men as they approached her favorite lounging-place. This was surrounded by an almost unbroken hedge of thorny bushes.

The pair had halted near the hedge, and the Don threw himself into a rustic chair, perspiring profusely; and, such was the interest in, and the excitement produced by their conversation, that neither of them thought of inspecting the space beyond the hedge, which was known to both as a frequent resort of the senorita.

Thus it chanced that she whom it so deeply concerned heard her destiny discussed and decided upon, without having been consulted in it in the slightest degree.

Her beautiful eyes opened wide in astonishment at first, but toward the close they blazed with anger; while her pearly teeth were set tight together, and her hands were clinched, as her lips seemed to utter a vow—none the less strong from being only whispered.

She was like one of the volcanoes of her land, burning under a mantle of snow; and it would have been plain to an observer that Don Juan would have no easy task in inducing his daughter to wed any man whom she did not love with all the fierce ardor of her fiery nature.

From that moment Anita de Casas knew what it was for which she had pined—namely, the love of some one, handsome, brave, and noble, and the picture of whom she at once began to paint in her imagination.

Never, thus far, had she met a young man of her own station in life, as she had been kept in close seclusion; and all of the opposite sex she had seen, were the low, ignorant, and swarthy *peons* of her father. Yet, for all that, she had ideas of her own, and was enraged at the thought of being disposed of in any way, and more especially that some one old enough to be her father should be selected for her.

But, angered as was Anita, she dared not betray, either to her parent or her confessor, the fact that she had been a listener to their conversation; and she feared they would suspect as much did she endeavor to prevail on the Don not to put himself to any trouble in selecting a husband for her. Then she thought of the bull-fight, which was soon to

come off, and to which she had looked forward with such pleasant anticipations. It was to have been her first appearance on any such public occasion.

Would the departure of her father for Chihuahua cause him to prohibit her from attending it? This thought was by no means quieting.

But let him. She would tease the *padre* to escort her in any event, and should he refuse she would go with her aunt; yes, she would compel the old lady to accede to her wishes. Even if that failed, she would ride to Presidio del Norte secretly, and witness the exhibition.

Her lovely face flushed with excitement, while her eyes spoke a longing deeper than before; her gaze seeming to be fixed upon an imaginary scene. Clearly Anita seemed changed in an instant.

Were coming events casting their shadows before? Did she have a presentiment that she was to meet the hero of her day-dreams at the bull-fight, and that the exhibition, as an exhibition, would claim but little of her attention?

So, indeed, it appeared, were one to judge from the expression of her countenance.

CHAPTER II.

LITTLE LONE STAR.

ALTHOUGH Anita de Casas had since childhood been within the close seclusion of a convent school, having returned to her home but a few months previous to the opening of our story, yet it had become known far and wide that the old Don had a lovely daughter, who was also heiress to all his vast wealth.

The slaves of her father regarded her as but little below the angels, for she was invariably kind and benevolent; just the opposite of their master in every respect—mentally, morally and physically. They had sounded her praises, as had also more than one of the persecuted victims of Don Juan's anger who had fled from his domains.

Knowing that among the bandits of the mountains—whose chief was the daring and merciless Caldelas, the Coyote, who infested the Chihuahua mountains at that period—knowing that many who hated him, and who had sworn to slay him were in that outlaw band, Don Juan de Casas felt rather averse to going beyond his own ranges. Hence it will be seen that it was somewhat of a risk, and only an important cause that could make him undertake the journey to Chihuahua City. Then, too, as has been said, he would miss his pet diversion, the bull-fight.

But all Presidio del Norte, at least the male portion of the inhabitants, were more interested in looking forward to a sight of the Don's fair daughter than even the exciting scenes of the arena.

The story of the great beauty of the young heiress had been circulated for months past, beyond the river, into Texas, and from ranch to ranch; and this caused the rancheros, after it became known that she was to attend the bull-fight, one and all to decide that they would cross the river and witness the exhibition, at the same time getting a sight of the old Don's marvelous daughter.

It is very likely that the latter consideration had most weight with the Texans, as a pretty maiden was of far more consequence to them than the fury and fighting of the wildest bulls of the prairies; and, indeed, this last would be no unusual exhibit to them.

Be it known, as well, that when a Texan, or a few of them in company, crossed the boundary line of the two countries, at the time of which we are speaking, they were in no little danger from the moment they stepped foot on Mexican soil until they returned to the Lone Star State—that is, if they were sufficiently fortunate to do so.

Consequently, it would be very much like taking their lives in their hands if they attended the bull-fight. But the Texan of those days seldom considered such an unimportant matter of danger to life or limb.

Their presence on the far frontier, exposed to death in some dread form each day and hour, was proof enough of this in itself.

And nowhere were there more brave and daring men than the rancheros of Cibolo creek.

Among these there was one with whom, as we proceed, we shall have much to do.

His name was William Waldron, but no one ever thought of addressing him by it, and there were many who had never heard it.

He was usually known as Little Lone Star.

At the opening of our narrative he was but eighteen years of age, yet he was old in experience, as far as frontier life was concerned, having from childhood lived on the border and being in the saddle almost continually.

He was skilled in trailing and in throwing the lasso—was a most accomplished rider, and a crack shot with either rifle or revolver.

In short, Will Waldron was a thorough Texan, who believed that his native State was the fairest portion of the universe. And it was from his love for Texas, and from his always wearing a five-pointed silver star—the Texas emblem—on his sombrero, saddle-horn and arms, that he had been, when but a small boy, dubbed Little Lone Star—which cognomen stuck to him and appared most fitting, for he was small in stature, although compactly built, and with nerves of iron and sinews of steel.

He was quick in movement as a flash of light, his light blue eyes were keen and piercing, and his very air and demeanor speaking of one brave even to recklessness.

Young as he was, Little Lone Star had distinguished himself on the war-path against the fierce Apaches, and more than once had he caused marauding parties of Mexican bandits to curse him for

trailing them so closely, killing some of their number, and forcing them to recross the Rio Grande empty-handed.

Strange to say, this boy owned the largest ranch and stock of cattle and horses in Presidio county, his father having been dead about a year, and his mother several, when our story opens. As his father had met his death at the hands of the Apaches, it was not strange that the youth hated that tribe of savages with the most murderous intensity, and which he caused to be felt whenever occasion offered.

He was esteemed and respected by all—many of the rancheros who were thrice his age considering themselves not humiliated in the least by being led on Indian trails, and in desperate fights, by this mere boy.

Little Lone Star was handsome in face and form, and graceful as any deer on the prairies over which he galloped. He always dressed in the costume of the Rio Grande country, wearing, *a la Mexican*, a red sash about his waist and a broad sombrero, all of the most costly kind. He was the extreme of neatness, especially when his mode of life was taken into consideration.

The youth spoke Spanish fluently, though he seldom ventured across the Rio Grande. Indeed, few were the visits of any of the Texans to the Mexican side of the river, and these were made in the daytime, and in parties sufficiently strong to defend themselves were it necessary.

However, they anticipated no danger except from treachery and secret assassination.

The Greasers would stab an American in the back, did they get an opportunity, or lasso one from covert, never daring to face them and their deadly revolvers in fair and open fight.

The young ranchero had several Mexicans in his employ as *vagabundos* and herders, as well as several Texans. His home was situated on the Cibolo Creek, some six miles from its confluence with the Rio Grande. It was provided with extensive corrals, for there were times when all the stock were driven in at night and corralled for safety, as Apache war-parties often dashed down along the creek, and from safe lurking-places in Horsehead Hills, watched for opportunities to stampede herds of horses.

The dwelling of young Waldron was on the border of the timber of the creek bottom, and the vast flower-bespangled prairie was spread out to view from its veranda, dotted with cattle and horses—the stock of all the rancheros roaming free, as wire fences were then unknown. That the youth was comfortably situated and had no reason to be discontented with his lot in life, was conceded by all, yet they could not help deplored the orphanage of their favorite.

Often had he, when sitting of an evening with his comrade rancheros on the veranda, heard them speak of Senorita Anita and her father, Don Juan de Casas. He had once seen the haughty old Mexican, and detested him at sight, as did almost every one; and one of the Don's *peons* who had run away from his master, was at this time the most trusted *vagabundo* that Little Lone Star employed.

The young ranchero had been more interested in what he had heard of the charms of person and character credited to Anita than he would have cared to admit to others. And, as she was, according to report, the loveliest female within hundreds of miles, it was not strange that Will Waldron, at his susceptible age, often thought of her, and caught himself wishing for an opportunity to see her.

The daughters of the neighboring rancheros, who were few in number, were far from being either beautiful or intelligent; consequently the border boy never gave any of them a second thought, which was a little strange considering his oft-repeated expression, that he loved Texas and everything in his native State, except the Apaches.

For some time previous to this our introduction to Little Lone Star, he often, when alone on the prairies, had found himself thinking deeply, and with no little longing, of the old Don's fair daughter. He would even whisper her name, and try to picture her lovely face in his imagination, while his horse would, from the dropping loose of bridle and freedom from spurs, make halt and begin cropping the grass.

On such occasions, our young friend would speedily recover himself and ply spurs, looking sheepishly around him, as if he half expected he had been observed by some one, and that even his thoughts had been made public.

Little Lone Star had on several occasions been employed as Government scout by the commanding officer of the district, and the strength of his longing to see the beauty of Hacienda del Concha may be imagined from his having declined to act as scout when the bulk of the troops at Fort Leaton had been ordered up country to Fort Davis to cut off Lone Wolf's war-party. He knew that if he went he would be absent at the time of the bull-fight at Presidio del Norte, and would in consequence lose the one grand chance of seeing Senorita Anita, who, as everybody had heard, was then to make her first appearance in public.

Never before had Little Lone Star, since he had first taken to trailing and scouting, missed an opportunity to aid all in his power in defeating the Apache hordes, and he had always taken great pride in serving as Government scout. His friends had, therefore, thought it very strange that he had on this occasion declined to serve; but one, more thoughtful and observant than the others, hit upon the correct reason, evidently taking the bull-fight into consideration. He informed his comrades, but they all agreed not to hint at their suspicions, or to quiz the lad on the subject.

Indeed, the rancheros were delighted to think that

their young favorite had thought much and seriously of the pretty Castilian, for they knew if the two did meet, and should take a liking to each other, nothing on earth could prevent mutual love and marriage from following it.

The prospects were that there would be much fun, even though some startling adventure did not originate from the meeting of the youthful pair; for it was well known that Don Juan was a most inveterate hater of all Texans, and would be certain to kick up a merry old rumpus should his only child—the beauty of Chihuahua—fall in love with one of the detested conquerors of his country.

Hence it will be seen that Little Lone Star had heard enough not only to excite his curiosity, but to make him resolve that he would attend the coming bull fight, and for the express purpose of seeing Anita; and that she—although she would never have acknowledged it, even to herself—had determined to be there also, and that to ascertain if in such an assemblage she could discover any one who approached in any degree any of the pictures she had in her fancy painted.

Yet Senorita Anita had little hope of success in her object, far less did she dream that she would meet her fate at the bull-fight in Presidio del Norte.

On the other hand, Little Lone Star had a strong presentiment that he was to meet the only maiden who had, through her beauty, grace and intelligence, the power to rule his heart.

Debarred from a collegiate, and to a great extent a common school education also, the youth had, in compensation, been blessed with a highly educated father, who had taught his son much pertaining to a polite training; and Little Lone Star was an apt scholar, and often deprived himself of the pleasures of the chase that he might peruse some of the useful books his father had prized so highly. He was, therefore, far from being in such utter ignorance of the great world which lay beyond the prairies as one might possibly imagine.

Many there were on the Rio Grande. Cibolo Creek and the Rio Concha, as well as in Presidio del Norte, who looked forward with glowing anticipations to the day of the bull-fight; but none more so than Senorita Anita and Little Lone Star.

CHAPTER III.

CARRIED WITH THE CURRENT.

As a matter of course, Don Juan de Casas was under the necessity of revealing to his daughter his intention of visiting the city of Chihuahua. When he told her, the young girl not only manifested much astonishment—assumed for the occasion—but no little anxiety as to the safety and comfort of her father, on such a wearisome and dangerous trip.

She also expressed a strong desire to know what could be the nature of the business that was of such vast importance as to call for his personal presence in Chihuahua. While begging her father not to go, Anita secretly desired his absence, provided it was unattended with danger, as he assured her it was; for she wished to enjoy freedom at the bull fight.

The Don did not hint, however, that his business in the city had any connection with his daughter's future; and his assertions as to his undoubted safety on the trip, proved that he had some thought of her feelings during his absence, for he was at heart far from being without apprehensions in regard to her.

Anita then reminded her father of his promise that she should go to Presidio del Norte, and expatiating on the great happiness she should lose, did he go to Chihuahua, for she knew this was the only course she could follow, to gain his consent to go without his escort. So skillfully did she choose her words, that he never suspected for a moment she could entertain the idea of attending the bull-fight without him. This pleased the duped parent, and he made up his mind she should go.

He therefore informed Anita that his escort would not be necessary, for her aunt and Padre Jose might accompany her, and, with an escort of *peons*, they would be sufficient guard. Much to his relief, his daughter then ceased to question him in regard to his business in Chihuahua City.

The father and child represented quite truthfully "Beauty and the Beast," for the Don was short and corpulent, with an immense head and head-like eyes, and with but little hair upon his cranium. He was, in fact, not unlike a porpoise, while his daughter was much like fancy's picture of a mermaid.

Don Juan's preparations occupied several days, for at least a dozen mules had to be packed with the good things which, he asserted, he could not do without. Two cooks, a body-servant, several muleteers, and a score of *peons*, all well armed, were selected, and, besides these, there were extra animals, to be driven in the rear of the cavalcade.

The *padre*, who was still shorter in stature than the Don and little less corpulent, wished very much to accompany him, declaring that he could prevent him from being injured by the bandits, should he be captured. But Don Juan gave a decided refusal. The priest, he insisted, should remain at home; and, moreover, he would hold him responsible for the safety of his house and daughter.

Poor Padre Jose began to think he had a heavier load upon his shoulders than he could well bear, for he had heard it intimated that he was to attend the bull-fight with the senorita and her aunt.

Had he known what the future had in store for him, what would occur during the time he was to act major-domo, he would have prevented the departure of Don Juan could he have done so.

At length everything was ready, and one morning, bright and early, the fat old Don was assisted upon his favorite mule, which was gayly and richly

adorned, and rode slowly away southward. Anita and the *padre* accompanied him for full a mile, when an affectionate good-by was spoken, and father and daughter parted on the prairie, neither of them dreaming of what was to happen, and the dangers each would experience before they again saw each other.

On toward Chihuahua rode Don Juan, in the midst of his slave escort, the pack-mules in a long line, with the muleteers bringing up the rear.

Then, if ever, must the old gentleman have felt regret for having so often given vent to his violent passions, and treated his *peons* in a brutal manner, thus incurring their enmity; for well he knew that his life now depended upon them, and he reasoned with truth that but little dependence could be placed in them, did the bandits of Caldelas the Coyote make a dash to capture the outfit.

When Anita and the priest rode on the back trail toward home, both were unusually silent and preoccupied. The little conversation that was indulged in had principally reference to the probable time of the Don's absence, and whether there were really any grounds for apprehending danger on his account.

Padre Jose strove to allay the senorita's fears in regard to the bandits, yet his confidence in the safety of the Don was but slight, although he did not believe that, even were his patron captured by Calderas, he would be harmed personally, but only held captive for ransom.

Upon reaching the *hacienda*, Anita delivered her pony to a *peón*, and went at once to her apartments, where she found her aunt Francesca. The latter was in tears, bewailing the departure of her brother, who had not before, for years, absented himself from his home for more than a few hours at a time.

But the old lady's dutiful niece pacified her, succeeding in convincing her that the Don would return, safe and sound, at the time he had specified.

After dining, Anita and her aunt, as was their custom, went out into the gardens at the rear of the dwelling, where for a while they plucked and ate of the delicious fruit which was then ripe; Anita filling a basket with the fragrant flowers, with which she purposed forming a wreath while slowly swinging in her hammock, previous to her accustomed after-dinner siesta.

Singing gayly and joyously as the birds in the branches above her, the young girl strolled to her favorite retreat, from which hiding-place she had learned the object of her father's trip to Chihuahua.

Arriving there, where two hammocks were swung, Anita threw herself languidly into hers, and her aunt, who seemed rather sleepy, took instant possession of the other; the old lady, almost without a word, lapsing into a deep slumber, as was evident from her labored respiration, not to say snoring. Once or twice Anita also lay with closed lids, but only to spring to a sitting posture again in her hammock, and continue her agreeable occupation on the wreath.

Thus she became less inclined to sleep, although she appeared to be dreaming with open eyes, which were fixed upon a particular point, and with a far-away look in their depths that indicated she saw not the real scene before her. At last she left the hammock, and bent an instant over the form of her dama, apparently to satisfy herself that Francesca was asleep. Then the little beauty tripped along a path, basket in hand, soon reaching the banks of a lagoon, where just below her was a canoe, which was kept for her own use.

Anita hesitated only a moment. Then she stepped down the bank and into the little craft, placing her basket of flowers in the bow, while she unmoored it. The next moment she was seated, and idly paddling down the lagoon toward the waters of the Concha, which, as is known, flows with a swift current into the Rio Grande.

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For some little time she thus occupied herself, in a listless manner, gazing indolently at the rank and luxuriant vegetation on the banks. The longer she thus paddled and gazed, the heavier the girl's lids appeared to become; until finally the paddle slipped from her hands into the water, and she sunk backward, her head resting upon the flowers in the prow of the canoe.

Anita was asleep, and afloat on the waters of the lagoon, having gradually, as somnolence gained a hold upon her senses, become unaware of her position or whereabouts.

It so happened that she had paddled quite near to the point where the lagoon lost itself in the rapid river, and the momentum, although slight, which resulted from her paddling, carried her canoe slowly but surely into the shoreward current of the Concha, into which the frail craft drifted, gliding in a quartering course toward the swift current of mid-stream. The canoe soon felt the force of this, and soon was darting, with its sleeping occupant, toward the Rio Grande.

Sleep on, young and innocent maiden! for, to awake now, and spring up in that fragile bark, would be to doom yourself to death in the wild waters!

And yet, to slumber on in this way is equally dangerous, for the boat is speeding toward Babbit's Falls, each moment lessening the distance between the sleeper and certain death.

Beautiful indeed was Anita as she lay in her canoe, her fair head pillow'd upon a mass of brilliant flowers. It was a most lovely picture, and yet one most harrowing to any observer who could realize what the danger was.

There seemed, in truth, not the slightest chance for the maiden to evade the death that threatened, for even did she awaken, and bear the shock born

Little Lone Star.

of the sudden realization of her awful position and peril, without overturning the canoe—even then she would be helpless to aid herself, for the paddle was gone.

Better, then, that she should still sleep, and be transported from the depths of slumber to the depths of death, than to awaken and helplessly dash on to that death, suffering tortures and despair, the most terrible. For there was no alternative.

Not the slightest chance seemed there, for any one to discover the sleeping and floating beauty, for there were no ranches on either side of the river, except on the outer border of the bottom-timber, from which one could see more than a few paces toward the river; and that, on account of immense forest trees, and dense undergrowth, intervening for hundreds of yards between ranch and river.

And seldom was it that any one, except at the oft-used but far apart fords, approached the Rio Concha, through the tangled vines and chaparral, as there was no occasion for any one thus to do; the banks being, the greater part of the distance to the Rio Grande, quite high, and beyond the power of man or beast either to ascend or descend.

Such was the situation.
Assuredly it seemed that Anita was doomed to death!

CHAPTER IV.

HE CAME—HE SAW.

It was strange that the little craft kept a straight course with the current, as if steered by human hands. Surely the guardian angel of Anita de Casas was guiding the canoe! Yet, for all that death seemed inevitable; for, before the sun had sunk to the horizon line, over Babbit's Falls the boat and its precious freight must dash!

Would the maiden sleep until then?
It did not seem that there was, humanly speaking, the slightest possibility of a rescue.

And yet, Anita was not fated thus to die.
That same afternoon, Little Lone Star had mounted his horse and galloped down Cibolo Creek, and then across to the Rio Grande; aiming to strike the river at a point above Babbit's Falls. He had, at the start, intended to search for a stray horse, which had been missing for some days; but he had given up all hopes of finding the animal, before he had ridden half the distance to the falls.

Yet he continued on, and at some speed, although aimless and without object; but still, he felt himself governed by a strange influence which he strove not to combat. He had not the remotest idea there was a human being except himself within miles; for there was nothing to call one in that direction, it being so far from the ranches.

Still the youth sped on to the timber; and, although it was unreasonable in the extreme, he could not banish the belief, utterly without any reasonable foundation, that the line of timber hid something from his view, which was of interest to him, and which he ought not to miss seeing.

The young ranchero noticed that the sun was low in the heavens, and felt that he ought to turn about and ride toward his home; for he could not return at the same rate of speed without taxing the strength and wind of his beast more than he cared to do. Still, for all this, he continued his course toward the Rio Grande.

He increased the speed of his horse, determined to gallop through the timber to the bank of the river, and thus end the most mysterious and provoking influence which seemed to force him against his own judgment to proceed contrary to the course he should, at that hour, be traveling.

On through the timber, speeding along a path, the bushes brushing the sides of his steed, went Little Lone Star, his course necessarily winding and perplexing, for, eventually, all paths led up and down, parallel with the bank of the river, there being no possible mode of descent to the waters.

At length he selected a place on the bank which was tolerably free from bushes, and halted; taking into consideration the treacherous banks, and not allowing the animal to approach too near the edge of the great chasm.

From his saddle, however, Little Lone Star, could gain a free view of the river, up and down stream. Naturally he gazed up the stream first, and then swept the waters down, his gaze following the swift current. A singular feeling then came over him. His eyes seemed to be drawn, and held, by the on-rushing waters of the Rio Grande—heled in a strange fascination, until at length they overtook an object, speeding down the river—an object which caused him to start in astonishment, followed by admiration, which, in turn, was succeeded by terrible anxiety.

It was the canoe in which Anita was still sleeping, her head pillow'd upon the flowers!

It was a picture calculated to bewilder an observer, causing him even to doubt his own senses.

But not for long, as the great danger that threatened the young sleeper would crowd back all other thoughts. And then, the picture was the most beautiful Little Lone Star had ever gazed upon.

He knew that it was real—that the maiden was sleeping, unconscious of her position and the death that was ahead, for the roar of the falls could be plainly heard, and the young ranchero knew every yard of the banks, and their character, from the fort to the falls.

He had been thinking of the bull-fight, and of the principal reason for his having resolved to attend the same; that is, to see the much extolled daughter of Don Juan de Casas. And, no sooner did he recover from his astonishment, than the thought struck him, that this could be no other than the lovely Señorita Anita.

He had often heard the expression, "Distance lends enchantment to the view;" but he felt that the sleeping occupant of the little boat must be even more enchanting when closely beheld. He saw, at once, that her life hung by a hair!

Were she to awaken quickly, and be overcome with fright at her fearful peril, she would overturn the frail craft, and be drowned!

She must be rescued, and at once.

He would save her, or die in the attempt.

The kind Fates had led him there to save her.

He understood everything now. He knew what had been influencing him, the moment he beheld Anita floating toward her death.

All this flashed through Little Lone Star's brain in an instant. The next, he drove spurs, and shot from the timber, tearing through the undergrowth, regardless of thorns, and soon reaching the open plain. Then, down the timber line he sped, as if his own life depended upon a moment of time. Very busy was the mind of the youth, as he thus dashed along. He was reviewing mentally the bank of the Rio Grande, from the point where he had discovered the canoe to the merciless and roaring falls.

Only one point could he bring to mind, at which he thought it possible he might be able by skill and coolness, to save the maiden.

His one prayer was, that she might continue in that leaden slumber till that point was reached, for if not—

As to himself reaching it in time, he had no doubt, or he would have adopted another plan; one more risky, and one much less likely to be successful. Yet, so anxious was the youth, that he spared not spurs, but forced his panting steed forward, as if time was the sole question.

The handsome face of the young Texan was flushed, and his eyes were flashing, as he sped like the wind. Full fifteen minutes did he thus gallop, the outjutting timbers which he was forced to skirt, causing him to pass over twice the distance that the boat must float to reach the same objective point.

But his desperate race was at length at an end, for, suddenly, he dashed around a point of timber, and sped directly toward the river.

The ground was there much broken by both small and large wash-outs, or gullies, formed during heavy rains, by the wash from the plains, which gradually descended to the Rio Grande.

At this particular point, the north bank was entirely free from timber and bushes; the only sign of verdure being some scattering prickly pears on the upper ridges, between the gullies.

With some difficulty, Little Lone Star succeeded in reaching the bed of the largest of the wash-outs, which could not have been accomplished except at a distance from the river, the banks being not only high, but rough and broken.

Down through the wash-out, toward the river, dashed the youth, the roar and dashing of the waters of the falls, but a short distance to the east, filling his ears. The mad waters, to him, seemed to increase their din exultantly, as if communicating the intelligence to the rough and ragged rocks, that a victim was being borne to them, that they might toss, and hurl, and crush her to death!

Little Lone Star could scarce repress a cry of agony, as this thought flashed through his brain. At risk of life and limb, down the rough bed of the great gully he dashed. Directly ahead of him, the waters of the Rio Grande were comparatively little broken by rock rapids; but below them, a couple of hundred yards, roared a perfect pandemonium, the foam and spray almost veiling the black and gray rocks.

No sooner did his horse dash free from the towering banks of the gully, than the young Texan shot a glance up the bosom of the Rio Grande.

Not more than a hundred yards above his position, the bank towered many feet above the waters, and overhung the same; proving that he had struck the only point, as far as eye could reach up the great chasm, at which the river could be gained.

But the course of the stream was far from direct, and for not more than a quarter of a mile could he command a view.

This distance was sufficient, however; for, coming swiftly down with the current he beheld the canoe. The occupant, however, was not visible, except that some tresses of her long hair were trailing over the bow, and in the waters.

Little Lone Star had never before been so intensely excited. He at once sprung from his saddle, at the same time loosening the coils of both the neck-rope of his horse, and an extra lariat. Quickly he knotted the ends of these together, leaving the neck-rope still attached to the panting horse—the animal standing at the very brink of the water, and drinking with avidity.

Deftly did the youth coil the slack, and hold it fast in his right hand, adjusting an unusually large noose, while his eyes never left the canoe, except for a moment. Then he sprung upon a rock, some feet from the bank, which projected above the surface of the water.

The stream was wider at this point, spreading out as if striving to hold itself back from the cruel rocks below, which were waiting to tear it asunder, and hurl it down in foam and spray. But the swiftest current, the deepest channel of the river, swept close to the north bank, and to the very rock upon which Little Lone Star stood, as pale as death, with a lasso coil in his left hand, and a huge noose in his right.

Every nerve and sense of the brave boy were strained to their utmost tension.

Did the canoe keep within the influence of the main current, it would sweep within twenty feet of the rock on which Little Lone Star stood, but, if by

any slight swerve, it should be caught in a current that branched away from the main one, then there would be but a slight chance for him to rescue the maiden, and only then by plunging into the river himself. And, even did he succeed in reaching the canoe, it might not be until too late for him to hope to regain the north bank; and both would then be swept down to death—himself and the sleeping *incognita*—and be mangled beyond recognition!

Yet, not an instant would he hesitate in so doing, did the little craft drift beyond the distance he could throw his lasso.

Thus Little Lone Star decided, and at once.

His one great thankfulness was that the maiden had not been awakened.

He had thought of every possible manner of attempting a rescue, and decided upon one that was most difficult of accomplishment. Yet it appeared to promise success.

At all events, he dared not think of failure.

His attitude and appearance were most striking, and would have filled an observer with admiration. Indeed, the whole scene was such.

The canoe dashing down the river, the sleeping beauty its sole occupant—the foam-flecked horse standing, panting, on the bank, its great eyes fixed wonderingly upon its master, and at times upon the river—the towering banks, the southern one thickly overgrown with timber, which shaded the waters; while a glow from the setting sun, now low in the west, reflected down from the rosy heavens; all this, with the rapid rolling river and the raging waters and falls below, formed a picture that was both grand and striking.

Nearer and nearer shot the fragile structure of bark, and Little Lone Star braced himself for what he felt assured was the greatest and most important effort of his life; greater by far than all that were past, greater, probably, than he was likely to be called upon to make in the future, he could not doubt.

Life and death depended upon his skill and precision in cast, and upon his calculation of time and distance.

CHAPTER V.

HE CONQUERED!

The eyes of Little Lone Star darted now a glance at the canoe, as it shot down toward him, and now a glance in his rear, at the huge loop of his lasso; at the same time, feeling the weight and the curl of the noosed rope, by jerking it upward, and allowing it to fall back upon the rock. Thus he prepared for the "fine work" so soon to come, when so much would depend upon the deviation, perhaps, even of an inch in the cast of the lasso.

The next moment, an expression of relief and joy overspread his face, for the canoe had passed the strongest of the currents that branched off from the main channel, and away from the north bank. In fact, it had accorded with the hopes and prayers of the youth, and was now darting downward in such a course as must cause it to pass within not more than twenty feet of him.

In a minute more, the little boat was directly abreast of the position of the young rescuer, and the beautiful face of Anita was thus brought into full view. It was a vision of loveliness that nearly took away the breath of Little Lone Star, but the moment was fraught with the destiny of the lovely sleeper, and there was not an instant, not even the slightest fraction of one, to be wasted in emotions, no matter how great the cause.

Any observer would have been puzzled, and probably not a little annoyed, at beholding the scene, for there did not appear to be the slightest reason for the young Texan's being posted where he was. Why did he not plunge into the river to her rescue?

Not even a practiced lassoist could have seen him without anger or contempt, for there did not appear to be the faintest possibility that a lasso would be needed. Indeed, it seemed absurd for the youth to entertain the idea that he would be able, in any way, to assist the maiden by the casting of the rope. The only possible way in which a lasso could be used, as decided by a glance, would seem only to cause the unfortunate girl to be plunged into the current, and at once. To make a cast over either the stern or the prow of that boat of bark, the ends being exactly alike, seemed quite easy, but there did not appear to be one chance in ten that the noose would hold when pulled taut. It was a time, too, when a miss, a failure, meant death!

Any one who realized fully the situation of affairs would have been greatly infuriated at Little Lone Star, as the latter allowed the canoe to shoot past him; thus losing all chance to effect a cast, supposing that such had been his intention, useless as it appeared.

But the youth knew what he was about.

One would have thought him dazed, and unable, from being in this condition of mind, to perform the act which he had evidently prepared himself to accomplish. He stood upon the rock, in the position, like a statue.

But it was only for a moment. Then the rawhide lariat circled, like a whip-snake, around his head, and the great noose shot through the air with a hissing sound, and thrown with a power and precision that were wonderful; for the loop-connection of the noose struck exactly on the middle of the canoe, the outer portion of it several inches forward of the prow, and dropping instantly into the water. Then, as the heavy rawhide sank, the keel of the boat darted directly over it, and the little craft was, for an instant only, encircled in its middle by the noose of the lasso.

That instant was the momentous one to Little Lone Star. He gave a powerful jerk, inclosing tightly the canoe and its occupant in the noose of his rawhide lariat.

"Thank God!" was the cry of relief and triumph that burst from his lips.

At the same time, he cast the slack down-stream, and jerked the rope, causing his horse to plunge into the water and swim toward him.

It was then that Anita, with an outcry of terror, sprung upward, and, resting upon one elbow, clutched at the noose that was around her.

She found herself in a position which seemed, and no wonder, like a dream of some fearful danger. Speechless and terrified, she gazed at her surroundings.

It was a strange awakening, but her naturally keen perceptions enabled her, after discovering she was in her own canoe, and that a young Texan was endeavoring to rescue her, to recall her latest waking recollections; and then, from the roar of the falls, she began to realize the true condition of affairs.

Yet, notwithstanding her great peril, her eyes were fixed in admiration and gratitude upon Little Lone Star, who was to her the hero of her dreams—one the like of whom her fancy had oft pictured, her beau ideal of all that was handsome, noble, and brave—just such a youth, in short, as she had longed to meet, and to know.

His very actions proved his heroism, and his skill, to have thus lassoed herself and her canoe, must be miraculous.

Such were the thoughts of Anita de Casas.

She was a brave girl, and she proved it by not striving, in any way, to release herself from the rawhide that encircled her.

She remained gazing at the youth, well aware that she was still in a most perilous position, and from which she could not, for her life, understand how she was to be rescued.

As a matter of course, the rope became as straight as a bar of iron, when the canoe shot downward to its full length, the sides of the frail craft being drawn together by the noose, which tightened with the force of the waters, that boiled, and foamed, and surged all around her. The boat was held by the horse, at least its downward course was checked to a great extent, and the animal was in danger of being choked to death.

But Little Lone Star had gained his point.

He had forced the canoe in toward the north bank, and to the inner margin of the more rapid current of the main channel, for the horse, being quite near to the bank, the jerk had slipped the noose slightly aft of the middle of the canoe, thus preventing it from being brought broadside to the rapids, and being forced shoreward.

The young ranchero had foreseen this, and had calculated upon it, and that, with a remarkable nicely. Thus he prevented the instant filling of the boat, and its sinking.

The moment he had cast the slack, he tore off his *fajetas*, belt of arms, boots, and sombrero, throwing them all upon the rock.

Then he launched himself from the same, afar into the waters, and toward the imperiled maiden; for he knew that his horse could not long bear the strain, and that the animal would soon be drawn out of wading depth, and then—down would go the canoe, and both maiden and horse be swept to death!

He shot with great velocity to the canoe, and without attempting to speak a word of cheer or direction, as the roar of the waters and the falls below would have drowned his voice.

But his eyes spoke volumes, as did the brilliant ones of Anita.

The coolness and bravery of the maiden under the circumstances, was marvelous, and filled her preserver with admiration, as did like qualities in him create like emotions in her mind, even beyond the feelings excited in each by the beauty of the other. It was no place for love-making, but the glance of each, as, one in the raging waters and the other in the canoe, they looked into each other's eyes, spoke of thoughts which would rule, in spite of time or place.

Soon Little Lone Star clutched the canoe, and battled slowly but surely with the mad waters, forcing the little craft nearer and nearer to the bank, until assured of success by getting a good purchase on a submerged rock which was not more than three feet below the surface. The next moment he had gained a footing, though the water was waist-deep, and he cut the rope and drew the canoe close up to the bank, upon which he stepped.

Then, with a smile and a graceful bow, he assisted Anita to arise from the reclining position which had been hers in the bark boat.

She strove to spring ashore, her fair face suffused with blushes, and her eyes filled with gratitude, but the canoe slipped, and she fell into the arms of Little Lone Star, which were quite ready and willing to support her.

Impulsively Anita threw her arms around the neck of her rescuer, who bore her along the bank toward his horse; the animal having, at the moment the rope was cut, struggled from the waters and up the bank. There, after shaking itself, it stood eying the approaching pair and the river, alternately, as if it could not quite understand the why and wherefore of all that it had been forced to perform.

By this time the sun had sunk below the horizon, and the shades of evening were upon the earth. Gaining the side of his horse, Little Lone Star placed Anita upon her feet, but the maiden still clung to him, and trembled with the intensity of her emotions.

The young ranchero felt that he had never really

lived before—that never, until then, had he known what joy and happiness meant.

He was startled at the wonderful beauty of the girl he had saved, and he believed most firmly it had been ordered that they were to meet as they had done, and that they were to love each other ever after. New though the emotion was, he was confident his love was not misplaced, and that it was in a measure, returned.

Impulsive young Southerner that he was, he did not think it was rushing matters thus to think and act, before speaking to each other, or even knowing each other's names.

Not a thought occurred to either that they were too familiar on short, or indeed on no acquaintance. They were supremely happy, and had no room for any other thoughts.

All other people, and all other matters, were to them as nothing, for the time.

Little Lone Star had no doubt that he held in his arms the Senorita Anita, the only child and heiress of Don Juan de Casas; and he then and there made a vow that he would win the heart and hand of the proud and wealthy old Castilian's daughter.

He knew that the old Don hated Texans, and that he would not hesitate to bribe some assassin to slay him, did he know or suspect his intentions toward his child; yet Little Lone Star did not care a pica-yune for Don Juan or his hired assassins. At the same time, he considered that the young lady herself might be placed in a very embarrassing position through the occurrences of that afternoon.

Night was now near at hand, and it was but reasonable to presume that Anita's absence had been discovered. He could not convey her to her home, without being seen by some one in or about the *hacienda*, and that would cause any amount of trouble to both.

Clearly, they must part where they were, but he resolved that before doing so, he would arrange with Anita for a future meeting.

But he was perplexed what action to take.

If it were known that the senorita and he had been together even for that brief space, and the circumstances of their meeting should be known also, there would be no end of scandal, and the old Don would take immediate steps to prevent his daughter from again seeing the detested young Texan.

The mind of the youth was now in a dizzy whirl, and much the same thoughts and conclusions were disturbing Anita at the same time, although she, knowing the absence of her father—and thanking the saints that such was the case—was less concerned than he, and her brain was active in concocting plans to bring matters to a favorable issue.

So excited was the youthful pair, and so strangely placed toward each other, that words, even had the din of the falls permitted the low accents fitted to the occasion to be heard, seemed at the moment entirely out of place. Thus they remained silent.

But, for all that, young Waldron and Anita understood each other.

The glance of eye was ten times more filled with meaning than could have been any words of the tongue; nay, it even seemed more suitable than any spoken declaration, whether formal or impassioned.

CHAPTER VI.

A ROMANTIC RETURN.

BUT such a state of affairs must of necessity be of short duration.

Action, both felt, was necessary.

And both, it was evident, came to this conclusion at the same moment, for Little Lone Star removed his arm from Anita's waist, and the maiden stood erect. Life was, henceforth, real and earnest for them both.

The Texan boy, notwithstanding he was young in years, was every inch a man.

But the growing gloom impressed them with the importance of a speedy departure.

Springing to his saddle, Little Lone Star leaned downward, clasping Anita's waist; she sprung upward at the same instant, and the next was seated before him, supported by his left arm while her right clasped his shoulder.

Happiness and trust were expressed in every act and look of the Castilian girl.

The horse ambled up the bed of the gully, on its back trail. No sooner had they passed a short distance between the high walls of the wash-out, than the roar and dash of the falls became much less. Speech was then possible, and Anita was the first to break the enforced silence:

"*Santissima Maria!*" she exclaimed. "You have saved me from death, and I—what shall I say? Will you tell me your name, and where your home is?"

"Yes, presently," was the reply; "but I am only too happy in having been able to do you a service. As to my name, let me first guess yours. You are the Senorita Anita, the daughter of Don Juan de Casas. Am I not right?"

"I am known as Little Lone Star, and my ranch is on Cibolo Creek. I am a Texan, of course, and I am proud to say it."

"My real name is William Waldron. How do you like it? But I am forgetting. How came you to be in such a dangerous situation?"

"Little Lone Star," repeated Anita, in a silvery tone. "It is a pretty name—very, very pretty—and I can never look in the sky without thinking of you. And I shall think of you always. But how came you to know my name?"

This she asked quickly, and with manifest curiosity.

"It cannot be that we have met before?"

"No, senorita; but I have often longed to meet

you. I have often—and who has not?—heard of the beautiful daughter of Don Juan de Casas; and, as I know of no other beauty in this part of the country, I felt positive you were she, from the moment I discovered you, sleeping in your boat, and floating down the Rio Grande.

"How did it happen? Did you get into the canoe for a row on the lagoon, near your home, fall asleep and then drift down the Concha into the Bravo? That was what I supposed."

"Well, I thanked the fates, or the saints, or whoever it was that had influenced me, for having placed it in my power to save you from death; for, let me tell you, I had nothing to call for my presence on the river, so far from my home, but I seemed drawn thither by something beyond my control. I am thankful now that I did not resist it."

"So it was, that I prolonged my gallop to the bank of the Bravo, when, to my great surprise, I saw you in your canoe, darting toward Babbit's Falls."

"It was strange, and I believe we were fated to meet, and that whoever brought about our meeting will enable us to overcome the difficulties which, I cannot but think, are before us. But you must have been missed at your home. Your absence will have caused great anxiety, and the people of the *hacienda* must be, even now, searching for you."

"What are we to do? How are you to return home without its becoming known that you have passed through such danger, and have met me?"

"Your father hates Texans, and, if he should know all, will seek my life. I care not for that, but I do want to meet you again, and often."

"And I will meet you again!" was the earnest response. "Yes, Little Lone Star, the saints have brought us together. I believe this, from my heart of hearts; and not even my father will prevent our meeting when I pleases us."

"I had nothing, either, to call for my presence on the river, so far from my home. Thus it was that I drifted toward you. And does not my life belong to you, now that you have, by your skill and daring, saved me from a terrible death? Why, you might have lost your own life in the effort to save mine. Who in the wide world, then, has any right to prevent our being the best of friends? None shall do so! None dare do so!"

"We need fear nothing, at present, from my father. He has gone to Chihuahua, to select a husband for me, and when he returns I shall want you to shoot the man he brings with him!"

"I shall choose my own husband; and, if you care for me, if you can love me, I shall be yours, and that regardless of all the advice, all the anger of others!"

"Anita de Casas, I believe I must have loved you long before we met; and, since I have been permitted to see you, and to gaze into your eyes, I have loved—yes, worshiped you!"

"You are more than all the rest of the world to me; and if, after a proper time has passed, you will be my wife, I shall be the happiest being on God's green earth! But we must now form our plans to effect your return to the *hacienda* in a secret manner, keeping everything in connection with ourselves a secret also, if possible. Much depends upon this."

"We can arrange to meet in the bottom-timber of the Concha, at any time you can avoid being shadowed; and, as the bull-fight is soon to come off, we can see each other at the Presidio del Norte. And, let me tell you that I had already decided to attend the exhibition, for the express purpose of beholding the beautiful Anita de Casas."

It was evident that the youthful pair had arrived at a perfect understanding in a very brief time; but, in regard to love, they were both like children, having seen little of the world, and being ignorant of the rules of society and propriety.

But this very ignorance increased their joy and happiness, besides preventing them from fully realizing the difficulties ahead, that would interfere with their affection, if not part them forever. Indeed, what had happened might be the cause of the young Texan's being assassinated.

Anita was greatly rejoiced at what Little Lone Star said, and she returned:

"Yes, I shall see you, then, at the bull-fight. But I am so sorry we lost the canoe. I was very fond of it, and now I should love it more than ever. Is it gone entirely, think you?"

"If it is not washed over the falls, I will get it for you. But, how on earth are we to gain the gardens of your home? And, once there, how are you to account for your absence?"

"It is torture to me to part with you so soon, but we must consider that our future happiness may depend upon present caution."

"Holy Mother! I do not know in what manner to reach my apartment without being discovered," answered Anita, in an anxious voice and manner, proving that, not until then, had she fully realized her peculiar position, and that she was now greatly worried. Then she laughed.

"Padre Jose will be half crazy on my account, as I was left in his charge by my father, and aunt Francesca will be ready to expire in her alarm. Yes, they will, no doubt, believe me drowned. It is too bad."

"If I could gain the roof of the *hacienda*, I could reach my own room undiscovered, and then I could get up some plausible explanation of my absence. But it is useless to talk of this. It is impossible for me to get there."

"Do not fear, Anita. I will place you on the roof of the Hacienda del Concha before morning, if not before midnight. My horse is fatigued, and we must journey slowly. However, I am confident that all will end well."

"Your aunt and the *padre* will have become

wearied with the search, before we can get to the vicinity of your home."

This he said, while his horse picked its own way along the timber line, in the direction of the ford and the fort.

And, full three hours had passed before the strangely met pair forded the Rio Grande, and keeping within the timber of the Rio Concha, proceeded slowly, and with the utmost caution, toward the *hacienda*, which was but three miles from the ford. A portion of the time was passed in low converse, during which each related to the other all that did or had pertained to their young lives, their hopes and fears and plans for the future.

Strange indeed, had been the circumstances that had brought the young Texan into the company of the beautiful and wealthy Mexican girl; strange their long night ride and wooing; and yet stranger and more startling events were to happen, which were to cause much anguish and apprehension to both. The moment of their meeting seemed to be the turning point in the lives of each, and also the signal for a general demoralization and disruption of affairs, with them, and with those who were connected with them.

Poor Anita was quite weary and fatigued before the journey came to an end, yet she gave not a thought to her personal discomfort. Indeed she felt that she could have gone on thus forever, without thought of home or of aught else.

But all things have an end, and so had this ride in the darkness. It came to a close when they reached the rear garden wall.

"Home at last!" whispered Little Lone Star.

All was silent, about the dwelling and the grounds; but, as the windows all looked upon the *patio*, or court-yard, it was impossible to tell what might be going on within the walls. Without dismounting, the youth assisted Anita from the saddle to the top of the garden wall. Then, taking an extra lasso which he had carried, he climbed up beside her.

Soon he lowered the maiden with the rope, and then himself sprang to the ground.

Hand in hand, the pair stole through the shrubbery to the rear wall of the *hacienda*.

The door in this wall was tightly closed and locked.

But their plans had already been formed.

Little Lone Star cast his lasso, the noose encircling one of the water spouts near the top of the wall of the dwelling. He then climbed up the rope, stood upon the spout, and lowered the lasso. Anita placed it around her form, below her arms, and clinging with her hands above her head, to the rawhide rope, was soon drawn up beside him.

The next minute, both stood upon the flat roof of the building; having climbed over the breastworks of the wall, above the water spouts.

Not until then did they perceive that the court was illuminated. They could also hear the sound of human voices from below.

Together they stepped along to the opposite side of the roof, to gain a view of the *patio*.

Great caution was necessary, to avoid being discovered from the court yard, as they both knew; for the sounds which they heard, and the bright glow of torches, proved plainly that late as was the hour, the slaves, who had without doubt been searching for some trace of their young mistress, had not up to that time abandoned their search.

They reached the inner wall, when, by using great caution, Anita and her Texan lover were enabled to get a full view.

A most exciting scene it was.

About twenty equipped mustangs were standing within the court, some of the animals showing plainly that they had received harsh usage, while others were but newly saddled.

A number of the *peones* were there, all in great excitement, and much troubled, as was plainly to be seen, while Padre Jose, pale and evidently greatly agonized in mind, was rushing from one group to another, giving orders, and conferring with the swarthy wild riders.

It was also evident that little hope of finding her remained in the breasts of any among them.

"They have nearly all decided, Anita, that you are lost to them forever. I am sorry they feel so. How will you proceed now?"

"I shall go to my apartment for some blankets, bring them up to the roof, and pretend I have been sleeping here all the time. The success of this, however, depends upon one thing. If the roof has been already searched, my explanation will be as nothing.

"But I must go whether or not. There is risk every way. You must leave also, and at once. Danger lurks, you can see plainly."

"Adios, Senor Waldron! We shall meet again, and soon. Have no fears for that."

A moment more and Anita stood on the roof of her home, while Little Lone Star noiselessly gained his horse, and mounting, hastened toward his distant ranch.

Soon he crossed the Rio Grande, reached Cibolo Creek, and the night's adventures had ended.

All that was to result therefrom, however—when were they to end?

CHAPTER VII.

THE COYOTE AND ITS PREY.

No sooner had Anita found herself alone on the roof than she became greatly agitated—extremely anxious as to the singular state of affairs which surrounded her.

In all her young life she had never felt like practicing the least deception, until she had overheard the conference between her father and Padre Jose. That had made her a trifle reckless. And now she

was almost beside herself with joy, at having met Little Lone Star, and especially in so romantic a manner.

To him she owed her life, and to her he appeared everything that was handsome and daring.

It was a source of great gratification and pleasure to Anita that she was thus indebted to one whom she had, almost at sight, given her undivided heart, and whom, she felt confident, she could and would love with the whole strength of her nature, as long as life lasted.

She felt assured, also, that she was loved in return, and she was the happiest maiden in Mexico.

Yet there was much to overcome before she could hope to openly meet Little Lone Star.

Not until after the young ranchero's departure did she recall, with all its great significance to her, the intense hatred borne by her father toward all Texans; and little less, if any, was that of the *padre* and aunt Francesca for all beyond the Rio Grande.

But the girl's passionate nature became aroused as in thought she considered the great opposition that would be brought to bear against even keeping up the acquaintance of the young Texan. She vowed that, in spite of any or all of them, she would have her way in this.

It almost took her breath away to even think of the possibility of her father and the priest interfering with her and Little Lone Star, especially when she was forced to admit that neither of them would hesitate at crime to remove her gallant rescuer from her path.

These conclusions had their usual sad effect upon the maiden. She was ready to deceive, and utter falsehoods without end, rather than have her love-dream interrupted to the slightest extent. She knew that the sooner she now made known her presence the better.

Indeed, she felt it imperative to do so.

They might start out and renew the search for her, and, in that way, accidentally discover the young ranchero before he succeeded in recrossing the river. This thought decided her.

Anita was not long in reaching her chamber.

Glancing into her aunt's apartment, she saw the old lady lying upon her couch, weeping, and muttering prayers in an almost inaudible voice. She felt grieved at having caused such sorrow to those she loved, and, under the influence of the moment, she tripped forward and threw herself into Francesca's arms. Alarmed at this, the latter uttered a piercing shriek and fainted at once.

The cry was heard in the court, and the *padre* rushed breathless within doors to ascertain the cause; Anita, meanwhile, hastening from the room and gaining her own.

She met Padre Jose as she entered it, he having darted thither in his fright and bewilderment. There were two candles burning in the apartment, but they had needed snuffing for some time, and cast a sickly glow.

In this ghostly light the priest thought he beheld the spirit of the lost girl, and he sank upon his knees, trembling as if stricken with anague-fit, shutting his eyes in his terror.

Anita, notwithstanding the anxious state of her mind, could hardly avoid laughing.

Without taking the slightest notice of Padre Jose, she darted past him, her light drapery brushing his bowed head and thus adding to his superstitious terror. Out into the glare of light in the court she rushed, and into the midst of the mounted and dismounted *peones*, crying:

"To your homes, men, at once! I am neither live nor dead. You see me before you."

"I was sleeping among the flowers on the roof. What a fright you have given me! But ten thousand thanks for your services and for your regard thus manifested. Good-night!"

Loud *rivas* filled the air. A more relieved and rejoiced body of men it would have been difficult to find. They were all fond of the young señorita, as they feared and detested the old Don, her father. Those who were mounted alighted at once, and all doffed their sombreros as they gave the cheers.

Then a thought struck Anita, as she saw the steward standing by the entrance to his department with starting eyes and mouth agape.

"Antonio," she said, in a voice of command, "spread refreshments at once for all, and roll out a cask of *merci*! Now, my men, make free with all that is set before you. Eat and drink heartily before you leave the *casa*."

Bowing in acknowledgment of their hearty thanks, Anita turned to enter the house; but she stopped quickly, for Padre Jose and her aunt—the priest supporting the old lady—appeared at the door. With smiling face and a perfectly natural manner she met them.

The relief of the pair was beyond expression when they realized that Anita, in the flesh, was before them. The greeting was extravagantly cordial, and the maiden's assertion that she had left Francesca sleeping in the hammock within the timber, and had returned to the house and fallen asleep on the roof, was so reasonable that they never thought of questioning it. Strange they had not thought of such a possibility at first.

Then the absence of the canoe from its moorings was commented upon, when Anita advanced the idea that it had been stolen or had drifted away; and this was accepted as the true state of affairs. All seemed of the opinion that there had been much ado about nothing, and that they had been very stupid not to have thought of searching the roof, as was natural.

Padre Jose could hardly restrain his joy, and just as deep and sincere was that of old Francesca at the safety of her niece, for they had never in their lives suffered more anxiety and dread than since the ab-

sence of Anita had been discovered. They had good cause for this.

They well knew that their lives would not be worth a *maravilla*, did Don Juan return and find himself childless through their neglect, or which he would decide was such.

The search had been conducted without intermission ever since it had been found that Anita was missing, and when the canoe had been found gone from its usual moorings, then indeed had the blackest gloom been cast upon all. Both the Concha and the Rio Grande had been inspected, and the ground in every direction searched by experienced trailers, but without success. The trail of the maiden, as she went with light and stealthy step to her canoe, was imperceptible, she having worn but the softest and lightest slippers.

Padre Jose bustled around in his joy, as did the maiden aunt, and ordered a rich supper, with wine, for the trio; and to this they all did full justice, none of them having tasted food since the middle of the day previous.

The laughter and cheerful conversation among the crowd in the court added to the pleasure and glad spirits of Anita. All was expressive of comfort and good cheer, where, but a few minutes previous, grief and fear had ruled; and where they were soon to reign again.

For, hardly had the *peones* in the *patio* and our three friends within the *casa* satisfied their hunger, when the headlong gallop of a horse on the hard-trampled ground in front of the main gates, sounded clear and startling on the night air. This was followed by the cry:

"Open! Open to a friend of all within! I bring bad news of Don Juan de Casas!"

The porter sprung to unbar the huge gates.

The *peones* started from the long table and seized torches, which they swung in the air to kindle afresh the flames that lit up the court.

Into the midst of this, through the now open gates, a horseman dashed. Springing to the ground and doffing his sombrero, he cried:

"It is a hard task I have before me, Señorita Anita. Your father, Don Juan de Casas, has been captured by Caldelas, the Coyote!"

"Sinfísime María!" was the only utterance of the young girl as she clasped her hands in agony, trembling from head to foot.

"All the saints save and protect my brother!" was the cry of Francesca, as she started up to prevent Anita from falling.

As for Padre Jose, he stood with his eyes staring at the messenger like one in a trance. Evident it was, that however useful he might be in a general way, the priest was not one who could be relied on in an emergency.

The slaves manifested their surprise more than their concern, casting significant glances one at another; low murmuring words, the purport of which was indistinguishable, sounding from the different groups in the court.

The porter in his fright closed the gates with a loud clang, and stood like a graven image.

Anita was the first to show any presence of mind. Stepping forward, she demanded:

"Who are you, señor? And when did you see my father? How know you that he has fallen into the power of the bandits? You do not belong here—you are a stranger. Speak, I say!"

With a respectful bow, the messenger, a swarthy half-breed, and villainous in appearance, made answer:

"I was on my way from Chihuahua to the Bravo, and camped on the Rio Concha, where the water comes from the mountains. I met Don Juan with his *peones* and pack-mules, and gave them directions about their next camp."

"They passed on, but before going out of my sight, I beheld a band of outlaws dash down upon them from a ravine, and shoot down some of the escort. The Don was captured."

"Then, knowing where the *hacienda* was situated, and wishing that the señorita should know of the capture of her father, I rode fast to give the news, that you may send men to the rescue."

"I have ridden my mustang nearly to death, and am to receive no thanks for it, it seems."

"Pardon, señor stranger!" said the maiden quickly; "you must excuse me, for I have been suddenly and greatly shocked. I do thank you for your kindness, and yourself and he shall be hospitably entertained, and yourself well rewarded."

"But you have not told your name, and how you know that the bandits who captured my father were commanded by Caldelas, the Coyote."

"I am Francisco Flores, of El Paso, señorita; and I know that the Don was captured by Caldelas, for he rules the mountains, and I had been warned only the previous day of his presence near the spot where the capture was made."

"Thanks! Can you, or will you, if well rewarded, guide a party from here to the scene?"

"Give me a fresh horse, señorita, some food, and a few hours' rest, and I will act as guide to the mountains. But I fear that the attempted rescue will prove fruitless, and besides it is likely to result in the loss of many lives. I would counsel differently."

"But why, Señor Flores?"

"The bandits are many, and well armed, and know every pass and every ravine."

"While you as guide—?"

"Know but little, señorita."

"That is unfortunate. Nevertheless, the rescue must be attempted, even though I should lead the party in person."

Padre Jose and the duenna, as well as the *peon*, had looked on in speechless astonishment, as the beautiful girl had, with firm mien and the coolest

manner possible, carried on this conversation; the last expression that left her lips really dumbfounding them.

The *padre*, who had been left in charge of everything, felt himself of no account. Indeed he was incapable of reasoning or acting under these startling and trying circumstances.

Very little concern was felt by the *peons* in regard to what had befallen their master, and less even was their desire to attempt his rescue; in fact, they would not have grieved had his death, instead of his capture, been announced.

But their love and respect for their young mistress drove back all the hatred that had been caused by personal wrongs; and they, one and all, stood ready to do all in their power to rescue the old Don—thus greatly relieving Anita in her distress.

She at once ordered refreshments for Francisco Flores, and a fresh horse to be gotten ready for him; also directing a score of *peons* to be in readiness to follow the trail, forthwith, of Caldelas, the Coyote.

CHAPTER VIII.

HO! FOR THE RESCUE!

ALTHOUGH Padre Jose had, from the first, expressed his fears in regard to the safety of his patron, yet, so nervous and excited was he when the evil tidings came, that he seemed to be of secondary account as far as conducting a searching party went. But Anita, as has been shown, was equal to the occasion.

Her bearing, demeanor, and the cool directions that she gave astonished all.

Up to this time she had appeared very child-like and dependent upon others for all things, having had apparently little or no will of her own; consequently, the sudden change in her astounded both the *padre* and her aunt. Besides winning their admiration, it caused them to ask her advice in connection with the manifold preparations for the setting out of the rescuing party.

But a greater change had come over Anita than her friends imagined.

She had suddenly and unexpectedly found one to lean on, to depend upon, and to love with all that fierce and passionate nature, which until her meeting with Little Lone Star, had lain dormant, her will-power and command over herself being, in fact, unknown to her until thus called to the front.

But, be it known that although Anita did not to all appearances seem to realize the great peril which threatened her father and displayed but little concern, yet this demeanor and confidence were based upon a different foundation from that which her friends believed and which they had reason to believe. Her aunt and the priest were of the opinion that she was confident her father would be rescued.

But, too well did Anita know the character of Caldelas, for, not only had she for years been aware of his dark deeds and unparalleled daring, but she had good occasion to dread the bandit chief personally. She therefore saw in the capture of her father, not only the usual object to gain a large sum for his ransom, but to gain herself!

She had, when being brought home from the convent in which she had been educated—escorted by a strong company of lancers—seen the redoubtable bandit leader, and gazed into his black and treacherous eyes.

She and several other maidens had been in the midst of the soldiers when a dash had been made to capture them by the mountain outlaws. This had resulted in the defeat of Caldelas, otherwise the fate of Anita and her fair companions may be imagined.

The chief had seemed to notice the old Don's daughter particularly, and before dashing from her vicinity, he had been told by one of his followers who she was. Then he had yelled:

"I lose you this time, daughter of Don Juan de Casas, but I swear by all the saints you shall yet be mine!"

"Do you hear me, Anita the beautiful? You shall be proud to call me your husband, or you shall be the slave of Caldelas, the Coyote!"

These fearful words had never been forgotten by her, and she always shuddered when she recalled them. This, to her sorrow, was very often, for the dark visage and threatening words of the outlaw had been the nightmare of her young life, and so terrible had been this experience that she had never dared tell her father or her aunt.

Since finding that Don Juan was going to Chihuahua, the face and words of the bandit chief had appeared to her and rung in her ears many times. And the very instant the messenger had yelled his first words at the gate, Anita felt confident that Caldelas, the Coyote, had made his first move toward keeping his vow.

This had at first nearly prostrated her, for she realized the great power the outlaw captain would now have over her, having her father in his power. She could not help thinking of her own danger, and she was thankful that she had that day found a friend—noble, true, and brave—who would, she felt assured, save her if it was in the power of any human being to do so.

Little Lone Star had saved her from the raging waters, saved her from being dashed over the rough rocks of Babbit's Falls, and she felt she could rely on him in any emergency, which was more than she could say of any other person whom she knew.

As a matter of course, Francesca could be of no use in this dire extremity, and Padre Jose was little more to be depended upon.

Here was the great difficulty, for she knew that the *padre* loved gold more than aught else—more

even than his faith, and she was positive he cared little for herself, or any of them, but only for remaining at the *hacienda* as friend, confessor and counselor.

Nay more, the girl was almost certain she had seen an expression in his eye, during the report of the messenger, that was entirely foreign to such as the occasion called for; and she could not help thinking that glances were exchanged between the priest and Francisco Flores, that meant much more than either would have dared express openly. In fact, strong suspicions were awakened in the mind of Anita, that the intended departure of her father for Chihuahua had been made known to Caldelas, the Coyote, and who could have been guilty of such an act of treachery, who would have dared such a thing, but the *padre*?

Had this not been done, how would the band have been near Hacienda del Concha to intercept the Don?

There was another suspicious circumstance which occurred to the keen-witted maiden, and that was the fact that a stranger should have gone out of his way to bring her the intelligence that her father had been captured.

This suspicion had been the cause of the coolness she had at first manifested toward the man, for she doubted him at a glance. But soon deciding that she must be wrong, she had changed her manner and words.

Anita felt that she was encompassed by great dangers—that the bandit chief had taken her father and was holding him as a decoy to get her in his power, more to keep his cowardly oath than to gain gold.

Yet he might sack the dwelling.

All these thoughts came into the maiden's mind, yet she kept control of herself. Indeed, most remarkable was her command over her manner and mode of expression.

And all this came from her confident hopes in Little Lone Star, who she sincerely believed was fated to save her from any and all trouble and peril, and to crown her life with love and devotion, such as made it ecstatic bliss even to contemplate.

There was a strong motive, a particular object in everything Anita ordered.

She had one grand move to make, but which she would reveal to no one—not even to her aunt, and certainly not to Padre Jose as she now looked upon him.

Since meeting with Little Lone Star, Anita seemed to doubt every one else on earth. Even her father was not acting right toward her, by pretending he was going to Chihuahua on government business, when she knew he had gone with no other motive than to select a husband for herself. She could not forget this.

Having made up her mind what course to follow, Anita proceeded to give her orders accordingly. First, she gave directions to the *peons*, to corral all the horses which they had used in their search for her, and equip fresh stock, besides providing themselves with food, and everything else they might need; desiring Padre Jose to superintend the preparations of the rescuing party, and also requesting him to take command of the same.

The priest, whom Anita watched keenly, although furtively, and unsuspected by him, pretended that he was not equal to it; that his profession would not allow him to act in a military capacity, and much more to the same effect. But, finally, with feigned reluctance, he agreed; though the suspicions of Anita were doubled, for she could not help seeing that he really wished greatly to be in command of the rescuing party, as he could not entirely conceal his delight and satisfaction when she proposed it.

Reasoning upon the matter, the young girl was convinced that Padre Jose would, if possible, mislead the party, and make little or no attempt to rescue Don Juan. He might even seek a secret conference with Caldelas, to inform the bandit chief as to the state of affairs at the *hacienda*, and the prospects of capturing not only it, but herself.

Anita was surprised at her own keenness of perception. All at once, as it were, the scales had been removed from her eyes, and it seemed to her, that heretofore she had been a helpless nobody, relying upon herself in nothing.

It was a busy, as well as a wild scene, in that torch-illuminated *patio*—a perfect Babel of tongues. Snorting mustangs were led out through the huge gates, and other animals were led in. The clatter of hoofs, mingled with the mad ejaculations of the *peons*, who were eager for an exciting dash over the plains, though not at all desirous of dashing into the mountain fastness of Caldelas, drowned the voices of the ladies.

The *padre* made himself conspicuous in the preparations, and was seen by the watchful eyes of Anita, to be conferring with the strange messenger. It took at least an hour to get all in readiness, and then the fact was announced to the females by Don Jose.

The night was not exactly dark, but the moon drifted through a murky haze, rendering objects at a short distance hardly distinguishable.

The *peons* ranged themselves in pairs, and sat their mustangs in the *patio*.

The porter held the bridle of the mule that the *padre* was to ride.

Anita came out into the court, following Padre Jose, while her aunt brought up the rear of the procession.

"Men of Hacienda del Concha!" began the maiden; "the time is come to act. Do your duty! Bring back to me my father, safe and well, and each of you shall receive a hundred pesos from me."

"I shall pray for your success. The Blessed Virgin and the saints watch over you!"

"Viva! Viva! Senorita Anita!"

Thus cried out all, in concert, as they swung their sombreros around their heads.

The *padre* took leave of aunt and niece in the usual manner, muttered his blessing and an *adios*, and then climbed up into his saddle, and spurred to the head of the command.

The porter sprung forward, swung the immense gates wide open, and the cavalcade passed out from the court into comparative darkness, Francisco Flores riding by the side of Padre Jose.

Again the great gates clanged, the huge oaken bars were put in place, and none but the household servants, with Anita and her aunt, were left within the walls of Hacienda del Concha.

CHAPTER IX.

MEETING IN THE MOONLIGHT.

AFTER the departure of the rescuing party, Anita bade the porter extinguish all the torches, and then inform the other servants that they could retire for the night.

She then repaired to her chamber, prevailing upon her aunt to take a sedative, and retire. She soon had the satisfaction of seeing the old lady's eyes close in slumber, and, for the first time, she was free from observation.

It was a moment she had been wishing for.

Anita wasted no time in preparing to carry out a plan which had been formed in her mind, from the moment she had heard the report of her father's capture. Without delay she put on a dark hat, and a dress that was suitable for night wear, and such as would enable her to easily avoid observation. She also drew on a pair of French boots, with high tops, and spurs buckled upon them.

Then she belted a small revolver and a Spanish dagger about her waist, and, passing into the room in which the remnant of their supper was still on the table, she poured out a glass of wine, which she swallowed, and then filled a flask from the bottle. This done, she took a large key from a hook and went out through the door in the wall facing the river. This she closed and refastened, secreting the key among some flowers that grew near.

With hasty step Anita then passed through the gardens, and made her exit from the same, making haste to the corrals. In one of these her own ponies were kept; and, as her saddles were in a small building near at hand, she, without delay, equipped one of the hardiest and fleetest animals in the corrals.

The pony's knew their mistress well and consequently she had no difficulty in effecting her purpose without causing any commotion, or alarming any one near at hand.

As has been said, she had a purpose in view, and she was now about to carry out her proposed plan. All her confidence in her present dire extremity had been placed in the young Texan ranchero, and to him she had decided to go at once; and that notwithstanding she was aware her action were unmaidenly, and that she was, what might be termed, "crowding short acquaintance." But, for that she cared not.

Anita led her pony from the corral, mounted, and drove spurs; dashing at full speed, through the semi-darkness, toward the ford, which was three miles distant. This was the passage across the Rio Grande.

Little Lone Star was a Texan.

Heretofore, agreeably to the opinions of her father, and every one with whom she had come in contact, she had hated Texans, and all that pertained to them; for had they not slain thousands of her countrymen, and, by conquest, gained much territory which belonged by right to her dearly loved Mexico?

Now she had begun to feel that she had been greatly mistaken—misled by those who had formed her opinions.

Little Lone Star was, she believed, the bravest and handsomest youth in the world. And he had saved her life. Yet he was a Texan.

She believed in him, which was more than she could say of any other human being, not excepting her own father.

Her life, henceforth, belonged to him; and if that life, if more than life, was now in danger, to whom but him could she go for help and protection?

And she was going. At any other time Anita would have shuddered at the mere thought of what she was about to do, especially as she would have to cross the Rio Grande, and go perhaps among lawless people.

Yet now, as her pony flew over the plains, she felt not the least fear or uneasiness.

Every bound of her fleet steed increased her emotions of relief and joy, for, was she not speeding to the one who, though the other day a stranger to her, was now her hope, her happiness, her every world?

Great was her delight when her pony climbed up the bank of the Rio Grande on the Texan side, and she spurred on, across the plain from Fort Leaton toward the northeast, aiming to strike Cibolo Creek as near as possible to the ranch of Little Lone Star. For, he had described to her the location of his home quite plainly, and had mentioned the distances of several points from the ford.

Anita, however, could only estimate that she must ride twice the distance to reach the home of her rescuer that she had already gone over in riding to the Rio Grande. In her state of mind it was no wonder that she thought it much further than it really was.

Eventually she distinguished the outlines of a

dwelling, with corrals above and below it; the bottom-timber being in the rear of all. This accorded with the description given by Little Lone Star, and she urged her pony onward. Soon she reached the vicinity of the dwelling. All was dark and cheerless.

Could it be that there was no one within?

But Anita had no reason to expect to see any sign of life at that hour.

Up she rode to the main entrance of the dwelling, and then drew rein; her panting pony only too willing to make a halt.

Not until that moment did she fully comprehend the boldness of her proceeding, in thus intruding upon the one to whom she was already so greatly indebted. But it was too late to regret having taken such a step, and besides the circumstances were such as to excuse her. It could be no intrusion.

She was on a mission of life and death.

Her sole surviving parent was in the power of a murderous outlaw, whose aim and object, she was confident, was to get her also into his fiendish clutches.

She hesitated no longer, but alighted from her pony, leaving the animal standing, being satisfied it would not desert her.

Stepping upon the veranda, her cheeks burning, she paused. In what manner to summon the young ranchero, she knew not.

Then she perceived a large ox-horn, hanging by the door, the smaller end being sawed off; and evidently intended to sound a summons.

Raising it to her lips, she blew a blast, and then paused, trembling. The blast was far from being a loud one, but it had the effect of surprising both herself and another, whose presence had not been noticed by her.

For, no sooner had Anita dropped the horn, than the form of a man started up suddenly from a blanket, which was spread upon the veranda, not far from the door of the dwelling. The instant he did so, the click of a rifle hammer sounded.

This was followed by a hoarse, commanding voice.

"Blast my boots and buttons, ef I doesn't bore yer brain-pau ef yer doesn't spit white an' reg'lar chin music et onc't! What sort o' a critter air yer, ter come a-prowlin' roun' et this hyer time o' night, an' bu'stin' up ther siester biz o' Pecos Pete?"

"I've gut ther drop onto yer, though I can't peep across sights; so my Pilgrim Piute, or pirut, whichever yer be, I'm about ter perced ter perforate, ef yer doesn't pan out squar'. Spit music, er down yer goes!"

"Hold, my friend!" pleaded Anita, in considerable fear and excitement. "Do not harm me. I come on important business. I am in search of Little Lone Star."

At this moment the door was quickly thrown open, a light flashed from the same, and the young man stepped out on the veranda.

He interrupted the speaker, by grasping her hand, and exclaiming:

"And you have found him, Senorita Anita! But, in the name of all that's mysterious, what brings you here, and alone, at this hour of the night? What has gone wrong?"

But Anita was not permitted to reply, even could she at that moment have spoken a word, for the man who had, in such a peculiar manner, introduced himself as Pecos Pete, and who had not been observed by Little Lone Star, again broke out with the exclamation:

"Waal, blast my boots and buttons!"

"Just so. But what is it, Pete?"

"I slid in sorter quiet. Leetle Lone Star, an' didn't blow ther horn. Fact air, I camped right hyer, an' lowed I wouldn't let yer know I'd roved onto sun-up, an' I got hungry. So I staked my critter, and rolled up, an' I war 'bout ter bore that party piece o' caliker, fer smashin' inter my siester. Dang my dog-goned pictur'!"

"Air I dreamin' till yit, er what's up wi' me? Kinder jab me with yer sticker, leetle pard, won't yer, an' woke me up fer keeps?"

Little Lone Star turned around, half facing the speaker, but still retaining the hand of Anita, which fluttered like a bird in his grasp.

It was evident, as the light from the door played upon the young man's face, that he had been greatly but agreeably astonished at beholding the daughter of Don Juan de Casas thus standing on his veranda; and little less were the same emotions expressed at hearing the voice and perceiving the form of Pecos Pete.

Little Lone Star was bewildered. He could hardly believe his senses, which was not strange, as he had retired greatly fatigued; and the presence of both the scout and the young lady was a mystery to him, and more so from the fact that he had been so abruptly awakened.

But such a clear and well-balanced brain as that of the Texan youth is never long in doubt in anything, no matter how unlooked for and seemingly out of place it may be; and he extended his unoccupied hand toward Pete, saying:

"Old pard, is that you? When did you turn up? But excuse me, Miss Anita; please enter my humble dwelling, and be seated. I know that something of great importance must have called you out to-night, and you must tell me what the trouble is at once."

Pecos Pete advanced, gave his host a hearty shake of the hand, and followed the pair into the house, muttering and shaking his head, and unable to keep his eyes off the maiden, who seemed overcome by her emotions.

"Blast the band of my breeches! Hit's a dead sure an' sartain female, an' she's cl'ar gone on my leetle pard, sure es shootin'! 'Sides that, she's from the Greaser side o' the Grande."

"What's up with her? Dog'd ef I don't skip, slide

out, an' puckeres vamose ther ranch, fer two air company every time, an' three ain't!"

"So long, my purties! I'm kiverin' up wi' blankets 'bout now, while I kin lay an' snooze without keepin' an eye on ther peep fer sculpers."

Pecos Pete had paused before taking three steps beyond the threshold. He then returned to the veranda, and stretched himself on his blanket.

Little Lone Star led Anita to a chair, and then closed the door. Leaning over her, he said:

"What has happened, my darling? You give me great concern. Do tell me how I can serve you. Command me, in any way you please."

Anita grasped his hand, and looking up into his face, burst out excitedly:

"Senor Waldron, you saved my life! You are the only friend I can trust. I came for you to help—to protect me. You will, will you not?"

"To the death!" was the response. "But what is it? What can I do?"

"My father, Don Juan de Casas, has been captured by Caldelas, the Coyote!"

CHAPTER X.

AROUSING THE RANCHEROS.

LITTLE LONE STAR started back on the instant.

"Great Crockett!" he ejaculated, as soon as he could command speech. "Anita, you have my heartfeul sympathy. How did it occur? You told me that your father had gone to Chihuahua to select a suitable husband for you, or one whom he might deem such. Was it when on that journey he was captured? Tell me all about it."

"But, hold! Will you allow me to call my old friend, Pecos Pete, whom you have just met? He has come just in the nick of time, I fancy."

"The Don must be rescued, and I judge from your having applied to me, that you place little dependence upon the *peons* of the *hacienda*."

"Pecos Pete is a host in himself, and will enter heart and soul into any enterprise that concerns me; and this does greatly, for it opens an opportunity for me, a hated Texan, to gain what we so much desire, your father's friendship. Is it not so, Anita?"

"Yes, indeed; I should be very happy if you and my father could be friends, although such a state of things has seemed past hoping for. Should he gain his liberty through you, it might be different. I almost believe it would."

"Never despair. I love you, and you shall be mine if a thousand stood between us and said no—that is, if you love me."

"And you know I do," was the answer.

"Come what will, then, I am the happiest boy in Texas. I shall always thank the lagoon and the thunder of the falls for giving me the nerve and power to save you. But, I forget Pete."

"What say you, darling? Shall I call him to our conference, and let him hear your story?"

"Do what you think best. I trust you entirely in this as in all else."

"Thanks, Anita, for your confidence! I'll call pard Pete. Excuse me for a moment."

He stepped to the door, and called out:

"Pete! I say, Pete! Wake up, will you? Why did you desert us? We want you, old pard!"

"Who's we? What yer slingin' gab about?"

Thus grunted Pete, as he partly arose.

"Why, old man, I mean that young lady and myself. Hasn't she got sand though, to gallop from the Concha this dark night? What do you think of her from the little you saw? Come, speak out!"

"She's the daughter of old Don Juan de Casas, and the most beautiful girl in the State of Chihuahua!"

Pecos Pete sprung up at once, exclaiming:

"Waal, bu'st my buttons, an' b'ile my butes! Yer has set me all back, Leetle Lone Star. That piece o' caliker warginawine fast colors I tuck notice arter yer slung ther door open; an' ter think that I war so dog-goned luny an' puserlanimus es ter p'int a shooter et a female woman, an' 'speshly a young gal, an' a 'nation party one!"

"So that that's ther darter o' ole Don Juan 'cross ther creek, what's got more nags an' long-horns than any Texan galoot in Presidio county? 'Sides that, he has a double-barreled high-see-ender es big as a fort."

"Bang my back, an' break it, leetle pard, fer bein' a double an' twisted ole fool! Cuss my cats, does yer mean ter say that posy of a gal wants ter hev Pecos Pete sling gab with her?"

"Thet's just what I mean, Pete. Anita and I want you to join us in a council-talk, as the reds call it. I never saw the young lady until yesterday, and then I saved her from going over Babbit's Falls in a canoe. She had floated away, while asleep, from the lagoon by her home into the Rio Concho, and from that into the Bravo.

"I tell you, old pard, she's the most charming little girl I ever saw; and, what's more, she and I understand each other."

"Jist so. She shows solid sense thar, leetle pard. I sorter thort ther river run thet-a-way. An' so yer wants ter tear her from her dad in spite o' ther bull o' Ole Mex? Waal. Pete's in ther game, an' most giner'ly he doesn't git left. But what's she arter out hyer, in ther night? Reckon somethin's up. What's gone wrong et ther high-see-ender?"

"Her father has been captured by bandits under Caldelas, the Coyote, and she has come to ask me to rescue him. If I can do this, I'll have a hold on the old Don, and he won't be so dead against a Texan marrying his daughter. That's one way to look at it."

"Mebbe so, an' mebbe not so, leetle pard," returned Pecos Pete, scratching his pate in a perplexed

manner. "Ther ole man do jist hate a Texan wuss nor a rattler, I do b'lieve; but we-'uns ain't a-keerin' a continental."

"Ef hit'll help yer 'long in ther trail ter be happy wi' ther caliker, why we'll snatch ther ole Don 'way from that cuss, Caldelas, so quick hit'll make ther cut-throat dizzy."

"So yer saved ther gal's life, did yer? That's a starter in ther job. Waal, I'm ormighty glad. fer she's slam-up purty, an' good clean through. I've hearn a heap 'bout her."

"Start on! I'm arter yer. 'Pears ter me I smell powder biz over ther Grande, an' hit'll come, dead sartain, ef Presidio county boyees takes a len'thy lunge 'cross ther drink."

Little Lone Star hesitated no longer. He even neglected to inquire of Pete as to where he had been of late, and what success had been his in hunting Apaches; for the old Texan was a noted scout, and Indian-fighter. The latter however, did not appear to notice that the youth was more interested in Anita than aught else, and had forgotten the most important and interesting questions usually asked when Pets visited him.

Had the old scout observed this, he would not have thought it strange under the circumstances.

Both soon stood before Anita, who arose from her chair, and put out her hand, saying:

"Senor Pecos Pete. Little Lone Star has told me of you. You are his friend, and his friends, I hope, will be mine. It shall be no fault of mine if they are not. My father is in great peril. I fear that he will meet with a terrible death if you do not rescue him from the bandit chief, Caldelas, the Coyote!"

The old Texan jerked off his sombrero in a girly manner that was almost ludicrous, and held out his hand to meet that of Anita, much as though he had expected a poisonous bite from a serpent. This was because the entire proceedings were so strange to him.

Many years had passed since he had clasped the hand of a female in his, and never, perhaps, that of one as lovely as was Anita.

The rough, sun-burned face of the scout was a study, but he got through the ceremony with difficulty, and managed to reply:

"Don't yer fret yer leetle gizzard, my purty friend—don't fret 'bout yer dad! Ef hit'll please yer, es I opines hit will—ter git yer dad back, why yer shill hev him. I doesn't keer ef he do hate Texans."

"Jist yeou an' my leetle pard decide what's ter be did, an' Pete'll do his best fer ter rush things through. Bu'st my buttons, an' b'ile my butes, ef yer dad sha'n't meander up an' down ther Concha, an' Caldelas ther Kiote hunt his hole when yer says ther word, er Pecos Pete'll know why an' wharefor!"

"Pete is true blue, Anita," put in the young ranchero, slapping his hand on the scout's shoulder. "and we want you to banish from your mind all concern and apprehension in connection with your father's capture; for, when we Texas boys start to do a thing, we do it, and we'll fix matters all right, you may be sure."

"Tell us your story, Anita, and we'll be patient and interested listeners, I promise you. Take a chair, Pete!"

But the scout squatted on the floor, clasping his hands about his knees, and fixing his keen eyes upon the face of the Castilian girl. Little Lone Star seated him by the side of Anita, and the maiden at once related all that had transpired since her rescuer had left her on the roof of her home.

She spoke of her suspicions in regard to the messenger, and also of Padre Jose, and gave a straightforward account of everything, up to the setting out of the rescuing party. She also related the fact of her having once met the bandit chief, told of his vow, and her belief that this was but the first step toward keeping it. She ended by declaring that she had no hopes that Padre Jose and his men would accomplish the rescue. Hence her appeal.

Anita further stated that she thought it not improbable the outlaw captain might take advantage of the absence of *peons*, to attack Hacienda del Concha.

"Thet's jist ther game ther or'nary galoot air playin'," asserted Pecos Pete, decidedly.

"Fact air, he's corral'd yer dad, an' ther *peons* what war with him, an' then sent ther cuss, Flores, ter draw off es many more, on purpose fer ter lunge in an' gobble yer up. Thet's ther verdict o' Pecos Pete, an' hit looks es though billious times war ahead."

"What do yeou opine, leetle pard?"

"It does appear like what you and Miss Anita suspect. But one thing is certain. We must act at once, get a crowd together, and scout up the Rio Concha. If we can make a dash at the stronghold of Caldelas before he has prepared for his raid, we may break up his game."

"There is no time to lose. Pete, will you saddle up, and strike up-creek on this side, and down on the other, getting all the men you can to join in the expedition?"

"Bet yer butes I'll do hit! An' I'll bu'st every button off fer ter help ther leetle gal, an' yeou too, pard!"

"Good for you, Pete! I knew you would not fail to work the racket with me. I'll wake up all the boys down-stream, and we'll await you in the timber at the rear of the *ha'ienda*. We must get over the Rio Grande, and well up the Concha before daylight, for the bandit chief has spies at Presidio del Norte, who will inform him of our presence on Mexican soil, if they discover us. So hurry is the word."

"But, Anita, what do you propose to do? Will you not remain here at my ranch until all is well?"

Your home is not safe for you at present, as you must admit."

"No, Little Lone Star, I cannot remain; but I thank you, all the same. I must return, for my aunt and the house servants will be distracted when they miss me."

"Besides, I should be in constant worry if I absented myself from home, when such dreadful things threaten us. I can ride back as I came, and I feel confident that I shall reach the *hacienda* in safety."

"Then, if you must go, you will accept of my escort to the nearest point to the ford. I'll warn the rancheros, as we ride down the creek, and they can get ready and meet me at the ford. Let us lose no time."

"Will you not take some wine? You must be weak and fatigued."

"Thanks," was the grateful response. "Oh, what would I have done but for you? I should have been lost, lost!"

Pecos Pete was already preparing for his ride up Cibolo Creek, to enlist the aid of the rancheros. Little Lone Star and his lovely guest hastily partook of some refreshments, and then he assisted her into her saddle; and, in a very short time, had equipped his horse and sped out from the corral, joining Anita, when he found Pecos Pete ready.

The latter only paused to say:

"By-by! I'll come a-hummin' with ther boyees, an' glide in afore sun-up, er bu'st off all my buttons. So long!"

"Good luck to you! May you fill the bill, pard Pete!" exclaimed his young pard.

Up Cibolo Creek dashed Pecos Pete, while the young Texan and Anita rode rapidly down the same stream, to collect a force of rancheros for the proposed expedition into Mexico.

"You are anxious about your home, I perceive," was the remark of Little Lone Star to his fair companion, at the first slackening up in their speed. He had detected a fresh cloud on her brow, as she turned homeward.

"I cannot help it," was the reply. "Oh, should an attack be made upon the *hacienda*, and I away—"

"I am thankful that you are."

"But poor aunt Francesca will—"

"We will not borrow trouble, Anita. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

For a good four miles the maiden enjoyed the company of Little Lone Star, when they departed; she turning toward the ford.

The young Texan was in his element.

On he went, arousing the rancheros, and requesting their assistance in rescuing Don Juan de Casas from the bandits, and in punishing, if not hanging, the universally dreaded Caldelas, the Coyote.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CLAWS OF THE COYOTE.

WHEN Anita and Little Lone Star parted on the border of the timber line at Cibolo Creek, the former to return to her home, and the latter to induce his friends to join him in the expedition across the Rio Grande, it was but an hour or so after midnight. The young Texan had not the slightest suspicion of any danger in the path of Anita, as she had but five miles to ride, three of these being on Mexican territory.

She herself was also free from any concern in regard to her own safety.

They both reasoned that Caldelas would not make an approach on the Rio Grande until he had corralled the party of *peons* under the command of Padre Jose. The girl's greatest anxiety was that her aunt might awaken, and again find her missing. She therefore plied spur, and sped equally as fast on her homeward ride, as she had when galloping to secure the aid of Little Lone Star.

The youth was, if possible, more deeply in love than ever. The maiden's great concern and regard for her father, notwithstanding the old Don's deception, and the object he had in view when leaving her, proved that she was well worthy the love of any man.

The young Texan could not help admitting to himself that he was the most fortunate fellow in or out of the State.

He was proud of Anita, and felt it a great honor to have been called upon by her in her hour of danger and trial.

He gloried in the idea of bearding the lion in his den—Caldelas, the Coyote, in his mountain fastness. He knew full well that it was a most dangerous, indeed reckless undertaking, to venture upon Mexican soil with an armed band; no matter what the object of the invasion might be. Indeed, it was little less than almost certain death; and, at best, they might consider themselves very fortunate if they returned to the Lone Star State without having met with considerable loss.

Still he intended to go, and he purposed returning, but not till he had accomplished his mission.

His hope was that this could be done by instant action, and cautious advance up the Rio Concha, dashing to the mountains and traveling by night, while he kept secreted in the timber or ravines by day. In fact, Little Lone Star would not harbor the idea or thought of defeat. He believed that he could, with a score of the rancheros of Cibolo creek, cut his way even through the streets and plazas of Chihuahua City and return in triumph.

He was confident that, with those who would accompany him, he could clean out the band of the notorious outlaw who held Don Juan a captive, or whip any Mexican troops that might give them bat-

tle; for he was well aware that the bandits were in "cohoots" with both the military and civil authorities, and also with the priesthood—all of whom reaped a rich harvest from rapine and robbery.

And very much elated was Little Lone Star at the totally unexpected events of the past few hours of his life, which had been like a new revelation to him; proving that the world he lived in had been, until the previous afternoon, a commonplace affair in comparison with that of which he now found himself a resident.

Anita soon reached the ford and was soon across, and speeding toward her home; most happy to know beyond doubt that she had wrongly estimated her ideal of all that was manly.

Not that she had doubted Little Lone Star would aid her, but it was delightful to have found him so eager and determined to rescue one who he knew would pay a big bounty for his life, did he know that the young Texan aspired to his daughter's hand. But now, should her father be rescued through the youth's efforts, Anita could not but believe he would appreciate the brave lad's services as they deserved, and she would be the happiest girl in the world.

Then, as she neared her home, a thought occurred to her that nearly stunned her.

It was that, possibly—nay, probably, for that matter—Little Lone Star, as he was so daring and reckless, might fall a victim to the bandits! Or, he might be captured and put to death in a cruel manner!

There was anguish in the mere thought.

Anita felt that, should such a terrible thing occur, she could not survive it; for she would have been the direct cause of it.

It was fearful to contemplate, and yet it was not at all unlikely to happen.

Not until that moment did she regret having called upon Little Lone Star for aid; but now she resolved that she would prevent his departure up the Rio Concha, or at least she would insist upon accompanying him on the perilous trip.

Having formed this decision, Anita continued on toward the *hacienda*, urging her pony into the timber before reaching the corrals; for she did not wish to be seen by any one. Up to the garden wall, to the gate that opened into the path leading to the door in the rear wall of the dwelling, she urged her horse without the slightest suspicion that any danger awaited her.

But, upon nearing the gate, to her surprise she found it open; for she remembered having closed it upon her departure.

She at once halted, but instantly her blood seemed to congeal in her veins, and she became paralyzed with terror; for her arm was clutched by a firm hand, and a voice hissed into her ear:

"Caldelas, the Coyote, never forgets! He swore that the daughter of Don Juan de Casas should be his wife or slave, and he intends to keep that oath. Speak not a word, or it may be the last that will ever pass your lips!"

"Keep cool, and mind what I tell you, and I will take you to your father. Padre Jose shall unite us, and Don Juan shall give us his blessing, either here at his home, or in the wild glens of the Chihuahua Mountains."

Anita could not utter a word. Too well she knew that dread voice; and, although the darkness veiled the face of the speaker, she could, in imagination, see it plainly as when, guarded by the lancers, the bandits had made their dash to capture herself and friends.

She knew the hand that clutched her, and the voice that hissed in her ear, belonged to that terror of her dreams, Caldelas, the Coyote!

Surprise and terror made her helpless.

Were all her bright and roseate visions to change thus, and forever, to black despair?

The entire unexpectedness of this interruption of her thoughts, and this presence so repulsive to her, completely unnerved Anita, and she made not the faintest effort to escape, or even to speak.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the outlaw. "You are very easily tamed, senorita, and I am disappointed somewhat. I had hoped you had some of the tiger in your composition, and that you would squeal and scratch. That would have made it more interesting."

"But, I reckon you'll show your blood and temper before we are long together. You had forgotten our short acquaintance, when I lost six good and true men in striving to capture you; but I have not forgotten it, and you and the old Don, your father, shall pay dearly for it."

"Where have you been? It is not healthy for young girls to be abroad at night. But I can guess. You have been to Presidio del Norte, to raise a body of men to trail me. You see, however, I have got in ahead—got the deadwood on affairs—as I always do."

"When they come, they will find the dog absent from his kennel, and the bird gone from its cage. But, I'm wasting time. You are wanted, my sweet Anita, in the *patio*."

Caldelas led the pony through the garden, and to the door in the rear wall of the *casa*.

Poor Anita was nearly distracted with the concern and horror which the threatening words of her terrible captor occasioned; for, from his manner, she was forced to the belief that he had the power to carry out his threats.

Could it be possible, she thought, that her father had been frightened into promising her to the bandit chief to wife, and that Padre Jose would officiate at such a marriage?

Badly as she had thought of the perfidy of the priest and the deception of her father, she could not bring herself to believe that either of them would act a part in such a worse than mockery, such a crime, as the outlaw asserted should be perpetrated.

Oh, how she longed for the arrival of Little Lone

Star! At the same time, she dreaded to have him come.

The coolness and command over herself that Anita had so lately shown, had forsaken her, from the moment she heard the voice of Caldelas, the Coyote.

The bandit captain conducted her to the rear door of the *casa*, which was partly open, and bade her dismount. Tremblingly she stepped to the ground, the hand of her captor still grasping her arm with a force that pained her; but the pain was as nothing to the dread repulsion, the horrible abhorrence, she felt at the touch of the mountain monster of crime.

He pushed her through the door, and into the passage beyond, which was perfectly dark; and then on, until Anita found herself in her own room. This was dimly lighted.

Caldelas glanced at the door through which they had entered, and then spoke:

"Prepare yourself, my beauty, for your nuptials; for, by all the fiends, to-morrow's sun shines on you as the wife of Caldelas, the Coyote!"

"Willingly, or unwillingly, you shall be my bride. But, to brace you up for the ceremony, or to assure you that you will not have cause for complaint as to the presence of your relatives and friends on the momentous occasion, I will state that it is to take place in the *patio* of your own home, with your father and aunt as witnesses, to say nothing of your servants; besides, as I previously informed you, Padre Jose will officiate. All this will be done that I may keep my oath. My other motives you can comprehend."

"I compel the daughter of the wealthiest resident of the State of Chihuahua to wed me in the presence of her relatives, her own confessor performing the ceremony. Don't you see the notoriety we will get by all this? I shall enjoy it, and profit by it, if you don't; for I intend to borrow your father's extra doubloons, for our wedding-tour will be expensive."

The poor girl gazed at him in consternation.

She could hardly believe her senses.

Surely her love-dream had been transformed into the most horrible of nightmares.

Could it be possible that this dastard was intending to carry out all that he asserted?

It seemed impossible.

Her father could not be there, and it was improbable in the extreme that Padre Jose could have returned, for the *peons* would, she knew, have fought bravely before being defeated, and would have, some of them, sped to warn her of the disastrous ending of their mission.

Her face was pale as death, and her eyes fixed staringly at her tormentor. Her lips had lost their ruby tint, but the trembling of her nerves had ceased; indeed, Anita seemed petrified, so still and silent had she become.

Even the lawless bandit was so impressed by her appearance, that he paused and looked at her with something of wonder, not unmixed with dread.

Had she interrupted him, Caldelas would have gone on with his taunts.

As it was, he felt a strange uneasiness.

But a turning point in some direction must come with Anita. She had experienced all the terror and apprehension that she could.

The outlaw chief saw this, and decided that he had better terminate the interview.

"Dress at once, senorita," he said; "I will come for you in ten minutes. Bear in mind that all I have said is true, and that you cannot escape me. If you do for the present, you lose all chance of being my wife, and I shall make you my slave."

"Thief! Coward! It is false!"

Thus cried the outraged girl, speaking for the first time, her eyes flashing hate and defiance.

"I shall be the wife, the happy wife, of another, when you hang by the neck a corpse, with wolves howling below, and buzzards hovering above you! Do you hear me? I swear it by all the saints!"

Caldelas was startled for the moment.

Then he regained his old-time assurance and look of triumph and bravado.

"Ha! ha!" he laughed in mockery.

"That is the style, is it? You show your claws at last. Good! I like you all the better for it. *Adios!*"

And Caldelas, the Coyote, vanished.

CHAPTER XII.

DEATH BEFORE DISHONOR.

ANITA had recovered from her bewilderment and terror, but what would that avail her?

She heard the key grate in the lock as Caldelas passed out, and she knew that she was a prisoner in her own home.

Then, to increase her agony, she recalled the fact that it must be nearly time for Little Lone Star to return to the bottom-timber in the rear of the *casa*.

Had she led the gallant young Texan to his death? The thought was terrible.

From the confident manner and unconcern that Caldelas had manifested, Anita could not but believe that he had a strong force with him, and that he apprehended no danger from the citizens of Presidio del Norte.

If so, and the young ranchero should become aware of the presence of the outlaws, and attempt to rescue her, he and his friends would undoubtedly be slain.

It is questionable if ever, before or since, there was a maiden who had in so short a time experienced such extremes of emotion, such joy and such terror, as had Anita de Casas. Difficult, indeed, would it be for any to be placed in a more agonizing position than that in which she now found herself.

She staggered to her couch and cast herself upon

it; her mind in a state of the wildest demoralization. But she could not even shed a tear. The silence around her was oppressive and ominous, and she felt that she must go mad did not something transpire in her favor in a very short time.

She even longed for the worst, if the worst must come to her—anything, rather than that awful suspense. It soon came.

Again the key grated in the lock, and Caldelas walked briskly into the apartment, saying:

"Come, Anita, my pretty one! All is ready for the ceremony. I see, however, you have not attired yourself in a befitting manner to do honor to your bridegroom; but, taking everything into consideration, I excuse you."

"Come, my dear! Your presence is looked for, impishly, in the *patio*."

Anita started up at the first words of the bandit, and confronted him with blazing eyes. As he ended his remarks she darted past him and out through the door, rushing at once into the court. But no sooner did she pass the portal than she halted, and stood appalled at the sight that met her gaze.

And, indeed, the scene was one of a character to impress and astound one who had previously been made aware of what might be expected. Caldelas had made no empty boast.

Along the walls, on each of the four sides, was a line of desperate and villainous looking men, all attired in brigandish costumes, and armed to the teeth. Each held a fully equipped wild-eyed mustang by the bridle; the men and horses facing the door through which Anita had made her exit.

She knew, at a glance, that these were the followers of Caldelas, the Coyote, and she realized that she was entirely in his power.

Everything there was now at the mercy of the outlaws except the *peons* who had accompanied Padre Jose and her father.

Each of the bandits had a blazing torch in hand, which rendered the scene doubly weird.

The taunting laugh of their chief sounded behind Anita, but she heeded it not, for she had caught sight one feature in the tableau, which was the finishing stroke of all. This was the form of her father, bound and gagged, and with a lasso about his neck, the slack of which was cast over a piece of timber that projected from one of the huge gateposts, and was held taut by the hands of several of the bandits. This was horrible.

The eyes of Don Juan were fixed upon his daughter in such a supplicating manner, that Anita could hardly breathe as she witnessed his terrible mental agony. Near the old Don stood his sister, the very personification of despair and terror, she being also gagged and bound; while Francisco Flores, the perfidious messenger, stood *accapta* in hand, guarding the pallid and trembling porter.

But there was another most suggestive portion of the scene to which Anita found her eyes drawn. This was Padre Jose.

He sat with a table before him, on which lay an open book.

The priest looked not at the daughter of his patron for his infamy made him a coward.

Not one in all the assemblage spoke a word. There was not a sound, except the occasional slight jingle of equipments.

What could be more suggestive of what Caldelas had declared should occur.

All was plain to poor Anita.

There sat Padre Jose, prepared to unite her in matrimony with the bandit chief; and, if the refused, her father was to hang like a dog!

Her refusal to answer affirmatively to the questions in the marriage ritual would be the signal of her father's ignominious death!

Had all the world turned against her, even those who were to have been led to her aid by Little Lone Star?

As to that Anita could not but feel that, even did her Texan lover meet with better success than he had anticipated in raising a band to invade the ranging grounds of the outlaws, he would not be able to collect a sufficient force to cope with the swarthy followers of Caldelas who were before her; and who with unparalleled daring, had taken possession of Hacienda del Concha, and were prepared to hang its owner, should his daughter refuse to wed their chief.

No wonder was it that she lost all hope, and yielded to despair; but even at this, the most critical moment of her life, Anita did not forget that Little Lone Star, and his band of Texans, who had so nobly volunteered in her behalf, must be by that time within the timber at the rear of the *hacienda*, and at any moment might be discovered by some of the sentinels stationed by Caldelas around the *casa*.

Her brain was in a whirl as all the dread probabilities of the moment darted through her mind. Could she act in any way?

The pleading expression in her father's eyes showed plainly that his hope was she would wed the bandit, and thus save him from an awful death. She knew that, had Don Juan been born with the brave and noble qualities of heart and mind possessed by Little Lone Star, he would have preferred even such a death to having her thus sacrifice herself; but such was not his nature.

She scanned the faces that surrounded her, but there was no hope in any of them.

Anita saw that she was doomed!

Again the mocking laugh of Caldelas rung in her ears, as with folded arms he stood in the doorway through which she had just passed. He leaned against the post of the same, his careless attitude and most exultant expression adding, if such a thing was possible, to the despair of his intended victim.

He waited a moment, and then spoke:

"Senorita Anita, you observe I but told you the truth. I am no idle boaster. That is not my way. People call me Caldelas, the Coyote, but it should be Caldelas, the Tiger, for the coyote is a sneak, a cowardly wolf."

"Not more a sneak, not more cowardly than you!" returned Anita, she having gained control of herself and speaking defiantly.

"You sneak! You coward! who bring your whole band of lawless cut-throats to capture and force into a worse than slavery or death a weak and defenseless girl! You would strive to bend her to your base wishes by putting a noose about her father's neck, and threatening to hang him if she does not wed you!"

"Base, cowardly cur! I abhor and despise you! and I tell you now that, sooner than be your wife—yes, even here, when all your proofs are so theatrically arranged to show me that I must resist in vain—I swear to you that you shall never take one step nearer the accomplishment of your villainous design than you have done!"

"Do you hear me, Caldelas, the Coyote? You have done your worst. There is one who, if he were here, would force you to the dust at my feet, make you sue for pardon, and then hang you, like the dog that you are!"

"Halt where you are, dastard!" drawing a long Spanish stiletto, and raising it at arm's length, the point aimed at her own breast, as Caldelas advanced a step.

"Halt, I say! Myself or death commands here! One more step, you base, low-born beast, and I'll bury this steel in my heart!"

"I do not wish to die now, but death would be most welcome in comparison with companionship with such as you!"

A murmur of admiration sounded along the line of dark-browed bandits.

Padre Jose gazed toward the maiden in wonder, as well as in apprehension for his own safety. Don Juan de Casas became more caustic and despairing in appearance. Caldelas was the picture of amazement and intense anger.

It was apparent that his captive had sharper claws than he had supposed she would dare exhibit.

The bandit chief was completely taken aback. At the very moment the prize, which he had long before sworn should be his, and of which he had gained possession without, as he thought, the least danger of being defeated—at that very time it now seemed that he was about to lose her, and not only her, but the confidence of his followers.

—For there could be no mistaking the intention of the desperate girl, whose dark eyes flashed scorn and contempt into his. None who saw her doubted for an instant that she was ready to end her own life. Caldelas was perplexed.

He knew that if Anita stabbed herself, and that through his persecution of her, his superstitious followers would all desert him, for they would believe that never again would there be any luck attending him—just the opposite, but that he would meet a horrible death, and all those who remained true to him as well.

Besides, he had set his heart on gaining Anita as his wife, and had bribed Padre Jose to aid him in accomplishing this end. But the cunning brain of the bandit was still busy.

Having brought matters to a climax, he resolved that the ceremony should be performed.

This could only be done, it was plain, by strategy.

A plan at once flashed upon him.

Without paying the slightest attention to the maiden, he glanced at those of his men who held the rope, and raised his right arm. They responded. The gag was cut free, and Don Juan gave a horrible cry as the rope tightened and he was drawn up from the ground.

As the sound fell upon the ears of Anita, who had seen the gesture of Caldelas, she turned quickly, and the hand which clutched the dagger fell nerveless by her side. The awful sight completely paralyzed her for the time—the sight of her father, thus dangling between heaven and earth, in the agonies of a torturing and ignominious death!

It was the very effect which Caldelas had expected, and upon which he had calculated; and he was ready, on the instant, to take advantage of it.

Springing forward he wrenched the knife from the hand of Anita, and clasped her form in his arms.

Then was the crowning moment of her despair. The poor girl gave an agonizing cry of terror, that would have rent the heart of any hearer who was not utterly depraved, and devoid of all humanity.

That shriek appeared to be the signal for a most startling change in scene, sounds, and state of affairs generally; for hardly had it died away, in a wail like the last appeal of a lost soul, than the terrific report of many Texan rifles, fired as one, rung on the night air. This was followed by the well-known wild and dreaded yell of the men of the Lone Star State.

The Greasers who had stood facing the *casa*, had seen the many spurts of fire from the roof, and at once they comprehended their great peril.

The confusion, that followed, beggared description. Even Caldelas lost all presence of mind for the moment. It was, clearly, the last thing that he had expected.

He fell back, actually staggered.

"Carajo!" came from between his teeth. "Those Texan devils are everywhere!"

CHAPTER XIII.

ON THE AZOTEA.

AFTER parting from Anita, Little Lone Star had dashed from ranch to ranch, and to request all who were to accompany him in rescuing Don Juan de

Casas, that they would make all possible haste, and gallop at once to the ford.

While in company with the beautiful Mexican girl, the young Texan had been much more interested in listening to the silvery voice of his charmer, than in considering the more matter of fact and practical affairs of the moment. But, after riding for some time alone, and viewing affairs in every light, he decided that the enterprise that he was about to engage in was one of greater danger than he had previously thought.

That which caused him the most concern was the periling of the lives of his friends.

He felt that he could never forgive himself, did some of his brave Texan pards lose their lives on a mission, taken expressly to please him, and to favor his future happiness.

It was true, as he was well aware, that the rancheros would look upon the dash into Mexican territory as a jolly picnic, during which they could gratify their vengeance upon Greasers in general, and the marauding bands in particular. Nevertheless, the raid would not have been made, Little Lone Star knew, but to benefit him. Therefore his peace of mind depended upon the utmost prudence, which was a virtue seldom indulged in by Texans.

Especially was it wanting when waging war on outlaws, or on the Indians of the mountains and plains.

Thus, before many bad enlisted in his company, our young friend found himself somewhat perplexed how to act. He began, also, to be anxious in regard to the safety of Anita, although he could not account for this anxiety.

The same influences that had made him continue his gallop to the Rio Grande on the previous evening, when there was nothing to call him in that direction, were now upon him.

These feelings grew stronger, and eventually caused Little Lone Star to decide that he would not venture down the Cibolo any further, but would turn and speed at once to the ford, where he hoped to meet Pecos Pete with his party. They would then cross the Rio Grande, and ride with all haste to Hacienda del Coucha.

He could not divest himself of the thought that Anita was in danger, and that much depended upon his presence at her home; in fact, he began to blame himself for having allowed her to return alone.

The night was murky, as has been mentioned, the moon casting but a feeble light upon the earth, and the horse of Little Lone Star sped like a leaf before the gale over the plain. Numerous other dark objects were also speeding from the black line of timber which bordered Cibolo Creek, all toward the ford near Fort Leaton, and beyond them, and more westerly, was a cavalcade with Pecos Pete in the lead, galloping wildly.

No a voice broke the stillness of the night.

Not a man but was eager to punish the curse and scourge of both the Mexican and the American side of the river—Caldelas, the Coyote!

Ere long Little Lone Star sat his panting horse on the Texan bank of the Rio Grande, the dark waters rolling below him, as he gazed toward the point from which he expected his pards to arrive. He listened intently.

Soon his practiced ear caught sounds that relieved his mind greatly, for a presentiment had forced itself upon him that all was not well with Anita. At length came a bird-like signal, and then Pecos Pete galloped up to him.

"Hyer I air, bu'st my buttons, an' eager fer biz ef hit's on ther p'ognine! He's gut ther up creek boyees jist chuck-full o' glad ter hav a show ter splurge across onter Greaser dirt. Did yer hev good luck down-creek? An' whar's ther purty gal what's shook up this rifle?"

Pete rattled this off in a guarded tone of voice, as he halted beside Little Lone Star.

"I've had fair luck, old pard," returned the youth.

"Glad you've done so well and are here on time. The señorita left me, to return to the *hacienda*, and I've been worried ever since. I ought not to have allowed her to go alone. Here are the boys. Good!"

Nine horsemen, well armed and equipped for the trail, rode up to them.

"Pards of Cibolo Creek, I thank you for volunteering for this trip, and also for your promptness; but I don't like to ask you to place yourselves in danger for a cause which interests me personally. I know, however, that you all, as well as myself, have long contemplated a dash over the Bravo, to teach Caldelas and his stamp of raiders a lesson. So I felt less backward in sending Pecos Pete to ask you to go."

"That'll do o' that sort o' gab, leetle pard."

"What's that Little Lone Star air slillin'?"

"Does yer think weuns hain't gut both hands inter this pie, I wonder?"

"Why, we're jist spilin' fer ter glide over ther drink an' bore ther yaller cusses!"

"Hain't weuns bin waitin' fer moons ter take a lung inter Caldelas's stompin'-grounds?"

Such cries greeted the youth, and he said no more, except to call out:

"That's enough, pards! Come on! We'll try the rifle, but we must play a cautious game. I want all who go over the Rio Grande to come back with me."

The two pards spurred down the bank into the ford, followed by the rancheros, and before they had reached the middle of the stream, five more were in it and following them.

Only a few words passed between the raiders, principally instructions from Pecos Pete, and which were passed from front to rear.

One man struck out from each side of the party,

as a scout, and one kept in the rear, guarding from any possible surprise.

They went by the nearest and most direct route to Hacienda del Concha, keeping within the shades of the bottom-timber. Upon reaching the promenades in the rear of the garden walls, they all dismounted. Pete and Little Lone Star advancing toward the gate, but noiselessly, and without placing themselves in the open paths—although the eyes that could have detected them in that gloom must have been keen indeed.

And a most important and startling discovery did the two scouts make, as soon as they reached a point near the entrance to the gardens.

The gate was open, the form of a man being in view at the same, and a pony, already saddled, stood near. Little Lone Star, stealing nearer, saw that the animal was the one Anita had ridden. She had, then, arrived in safety.

The garden wall was near the border of the timber, and it was much lighter there than within the shades; and as the pair were accustomed to night scouting, they, by studying the form of the man at the gate, decided he was not one of the *peons* of the estate.

Other suspicious circumstances were soon apparent.

Why had not Anita's pony been relieved of its equipments, and led into a corral?

Why was the garden gate open at that hour, and why was a man there guarding it?

And where was Anita?

She had said that none except her aunt and the household servants remained at the *hacienda*.

She had left her home secretly also.

Then, why were matts as they found them?

These things were suspicious, extremely so.

Thus thought both the scouts, and, after a short and whispered consultation, a decision was arrived at. They acted at once.

Both stole silently toward the opening gate, crawling upon their hands and knees. Then, when they had reached a favorable position, they sprung forward and the next moment the guard lay bound and gagged upon the ground.

When they perceived that the door in the rear wall of the *casa* was also open, they became more alarmed. However, they stole into the fort-like dwelling, disappearing from view. But, almost instantly, they again appeared, and ran back to the bottom timber.

Hastily they informed their *pards* of the state of affairs. Orders were given, which were as promptly obeyed, the horses all being led into the garden, the gate closed, and one of the party left in charge. The others, led by Little Lone Star, hastened into the *hacienda*, and were soon upon the flat roof of the *casa*, every man with his rifle in hand, ready to thrust over the breastwork at a signal from their boy leader.

A lurid glow hovered over the court, and, acting with extreme caution, each got a view of the impressive scene below.

Their astonishment was great, for they no more expected to see Caldelas and his band than General Taylor and the army of the United States. A glance sufficed to show them what it all meant; for the rancheros had heard from Pecos Pete the outlines of the situation in regard to the departure of the Don, the object of his mission, and his capture by the bandit chief. This, then, was the way in which the outlaw was playing his game.

Codelas had taken Don Juan having undoubtedly caused the *pudre* to influence his patron to take the journey, expressly for the purpose, he having, in the mean time, informed the bandit of the Don's coming, and the route he was to take.

Padre Jose had led a party of *peones* to the rescue, but Caldelas had lain in wait, and suddenly there taking the priest captive, as a matter of form, and then hurrying to the *hacienda*, where all arrangements had been made just previous to the arrival of Anita.

Everything had been well contrived.

The father was to be hanged if the daughter did not consent to go through the marriage ceremony with her captor, Caldelas, the Coyote.

The Texans were infuriated.

As for Little Lone Star, he was nearly frantic when he thus beheld his darling, thus anguished and despairing before his eyes.

He knew that she could have little or no hope of escaping the doom that awaited her; and, had it not been for Pecos Pete, he would have sprung from the wall, and down into the court. But the old scout held him fast, and whispered words that were effective in controlling the impulsive youth.

"Blast hit leetle pard, yer'll throw all ther fat in ther fire, ef yer jumps down!"

"Yer'll spill our gravy, an' spile our chances ter buck ag'in', an' bounce ther 'arnal hellions. Jist wait a leetle, an' we uns'll wax 'em. Thar'll be a show in a few minuts, fer ter play our keerds, an' hev some chance ter win ther game."

"Ther cantankerous cuss sha'n't hev that purty bunch o' caliker, es long es Pecos Pete kin draw bead, an' jark bowie. So, simmer down, instid o' jumpin' down; an' git yer long shooter ready fer biz, fer hit's comin' an' jist a hummin'."

And the time did come, as we have seen, when the Texan took a hand in the game, by pressing fingers to triggers. But Pete had been obliged to give the signal, an' also to hold Little Lone Star by force, when Caldelas seized Anita in his arms.

CHAPTER XIV.

RETURNING TO THE FRONT.

HAD Little Lone Star been able to control himself, when he saw the object of Caldelas, he might have

gotten a fair shot at the bandit chief, and rid the earth of him.

But, so furious had the young Texan been, that he was almost beside himself.

The daring of Anita, and her words, as she held the knife ready to plunge into her own breast, did her persecutor advance another step toward her, had filled the heart of every Texan with admiration and sympathy. There was not a man on the roof who would have hesitated to risk his own life to save her from further insult or wrong.

But, there were great coolness, skill, and judgment displayed, in firing the volley down into the courtyard. The instructions of Pecos Pete had been passed along the line of crouching rancheros; and it was not strange, under the existing circumstances, that they failed to consider thoroughly their position, and the time they must lose when there was not an instant to spare in gaining the court from the roof, after firing the death-dealing volley.

They would be forced to descend the stairs, from the open sky-light, and rush through two rooms, before gaining the quadrangle; and they might be prevented from making their exit, by the doors being closed upon them.

There was only time to reflect that Don Juan de Casas was hanging by the neck, and his daughter compelled to witness it, while she was held in the embrace of Caldelas, the Coyote!

None had dared shoot at the bandit chief, for fear of hitting Anita.

But there were many fine shots delivered, notwithstanding. Don Juan fell to the ground, a bullet having cut the rope; and, so horrified were those who held it, they fled, tumbling over each other, to gain their horses.

The court was one confused mass.

Shouts of command from Caldelas, and oaths, shrieks, and groans, rung out; mingling with the clatter of hoofs and snorts of steeds as many of the Texans stumbled back and forth, trampling over the wounded.

The torches of those who had fallen were, of course, extinguished. Others threw theirs from them, and fled from the *pain*.

For a moment, the Texans stood, looking downward, while they leaned over the *adobe* wall. But the light below was not now sufficient to enable them to distinguish individuals. They could not even recognize Caldelas, Don Juan, or Anita.

Then it was, that Little Lone Star yelled:

"To the rescue, pard! To the rescue! Caldelas is alive, and may yet beat us in the game. Death to the bor'er scourge! Death to the coyote who wars on women!"

The Texan yell resounded, as the rancheros rushed to gain the court, their haste causing such confusion, that they tumbled over each other. And, at the very moment their leader had yelled, Caldelas shouted:

"Down with the torches, and kick out the blaze, or we are lost! Are you fools that you hold a torch to reveal yourselves to the enemy? Those Texan devils are here—ten thousand curses on them!"

"Throw open the gates! To horse! And spur for the darkness! Hold fast to Don Juan de Casas. He shall die the death of a dog, if my game is ruined!"

The Texans made all haste to descend into the rooms of the *casa*, and, in thus doing, heard not the words of the bandit chief; but, they were well aware that he would at once take steps to escape, and endeavor to take the captives with him.

Even as they hurried through the rooms of the dwelling, it occurred to them that, as their horses were in the gardens, in the rear, they would be under great disadvantage; and, in the delay, Caldelas might get free of the court before they could make a six-shooter charge.

Little Lone Star was frantic, and Pecos Pete Little Lone was excited; for they could not help seeing how they were placed, and that the outlaws had a good opportunity and ample time to escape. Every Texan felt the most bitter hatred toward the entire gang, who could stand and witness, without a word, the cowardly torture of the captive girl.

With revolver in hand, the two *pards* led the way; the rancheros following them, in a blind rush. With what keen gaze did the pair scan the courtyard, which, to their great disappointment, was now dark.

Here and there lay the torches, still smoking, but there was no blaze to relieve the dim and murky night. The sounds, too, that filled their ears were confusing.

There were groans, also, from the wounded.

But Anita could not be seen!

More than this, there was not a mounted Mexican in view.

The last of the bandits had just passed out the gate, and shot the porter dead, as the two Texans sprung into the court.

Riderless horses galloped back and forth.

Pete and Little Lone Star halted, and listened, as the flash and report at the gate signaled the death of the porter. Then the gate clanged, and the sound of hoofs without proved that they were too late.

"To horse, pard! To horse! We must ride now for life. The inhuman devils have beat us, and carried off Anita. She is gone, and so is Don Juan de Casas!"

Then came a heart-rending shriek.

It sounded as all knew, from a distance beyond the walls. It tore through the brain of Little Lone Star, and he yelled:

"On, pard, to the rescue! To horse, I say! On, up the Rio Concha, and don't spare spurs! We'll run Caldelas, the Coyote, to his hole in the mountains!"

Another yell, and soon all were in their saddles, and spurring like mad to the front of the dwelling, and thence up along the line of the Concha timber.

They strove to pierce the darkness in their front, but could discern no moving objects; in fact no objects whatever. For the gloom was such as would have prevented them from seeing a body of horsemen, who might be more than five hundred yards distant; and they knew the bandits had ample time to have gone much further than that.

Little Lone Star was in despair.

He had good reason to be discouraged, for what he had witnessed proved to him that Caldelas would not hesitate at any crime to gain his ends.

He had, undoubtedly, taken both father and daughter to his mountain stronghold; and he would there be able to hold his own, and defend himself against ten times their number. It was but reasonable to suppose this.

Anita could not again delay her fate, as the knife had been taken from her; besides Caldelas would care little whether she married him or not, unless, indeed, he had schemed in that way to gain the wealth of the old Don.

And this was probably his object.

The youth knew that revolutions were frequent in Mexico, and that daring bandits were pardoned and given high military rank on either side under which they might choose to serve; and it would be an easy matter for Caldelas to force Anita to become his wife, and then secretly slay her father and aunt, which would give him entire control of the vast wealth and estates of the family.

All these things considered, and also the character of the bandit leader, there appeared but little hope of the young Texan's ever again seeing his beautiful Anita, until he and his friend could overtake the outlaw, before he gained the Chihuahua mountains. This did not seem very probable, considering that Caldelas must know every foot of the ground.

In no way, then, except by cunning and strategy, did it appear to Little Lone Star that he could rescue Anita; especially when, after a gallop of half an hour, nothing could be seen of the *lads*.

The air had now become more clear, and the moon shone more brightly.

The cavalcade drew rein.

All were silent and gloomy.

They knew they were in a most dangerous position. They were on the territory of those who had them, and if they kept on, they were liable to be surrounded by Mexican troops, or ambushed by them.

Little Lone Star broke the silence:

"Pards, of Picadie," he said, "we're goin' to have to skip. Where do you think he has vanished to?"

All shook their heads in silence.

Not even Pecos Pete had an idea.

"Then let me give my opinion," said the youth. "You all know that Caldelas is as cunning as a fox. He has proved that.

"What I believe is, that he has led us on this wild goose chase southward, and has turned into the timber, crossed to the other side, and sped back to the ranch. Perhaps he has already got possession of the dwelling, and is preparing to defend it against all comers.

"Once inside those walls, he can hold his own against any force that could be mustered in the vicinity; unless we, by stealth, can gain entrance, and balk his game. Great Heavens! He may be there at this moment, and Anita—

"What say you, Pete? For that poor sake let us act at once. Are not my suspicions reasonable?"

Little Lone Star had become more and more excited. He was convinced that he had lit upon the true cause of the unaccountable disappearance of the outlaw band; and, at the last, his words were strong proof that his suspicions had become to him almost a certainty.

All the rancheros were in great excitement also, and were evidently strongly impressed by the words of their young leader.

"Bang my back-bone!" was Pecos Pete's first exclamation. "I does 'bout b'lieve ye're nigh right 'bout whar ther condemned coyotes has skinned to, leetle pard."

"They could ha' glided inter ther timber an' waited ther until we was galloped past, an' then skinned back ter ther high-see ender. At any rate, they've clean glided outen sight, an' we was must jab spurs ter onc'e ter ther place whar we're lieble ter strike 'em, which air whar yeou say, I reckon, sure pop. But they mustn't know we unsair comin' back, er our gravy's spilled; an' ther pore leetle gal's gone up, fer sartain!"

"Follow me, pard!" called out Little Lone Star, in his voice that told his mental sufferings. "Strike for the timber, and keep in it till we reach the *hacienda*!"

"Keep as still as possible when we come nigh the dwelling."

CHAPTER XV.

ON THE BACK TRAIL.

THE volley fired from the roof by the Texan raiders had greatly terrified the followers of Caldelas, the Coyote. They had not had the slightest suspicion that foes were in the vicinity, least of all Texans from the opposite side of the Rio Grande.

It was the most complete surprise that the bandits had ever known.

Besides this, the rifles had done considerable execution, killing quite a number, and terrifying the others to such an extent, that only flight was thought of, and that instant and rapid. But even this was impossible, as the great gates were closed and barred, and before these could be opened, the bullets of the Texans would again scatter death among them.

This they saw at once, and they were for a time so dazed that they could not make a move toward defense, or even flight.

But then came the order of their chief, which, all instantly realized, was their only hope to avoid death from the raiders. This was to extinguish the torches.

Then came the grand rush, which was that of a demoralized mob. But Caldelas made sure that neither Anita, her father, nor the priest should be left behind.

He had three or four of his band upon whom he could depend in any emergency, and these he called upon at once.

Anita and her father were bound, placed upon horses, and hurried out of the gates, which had been immediately opened. Padre Jose made good haste to mount his mule, for he was filled with terror from the moment that he realized the Texans were on the roof.

Not for a moment did Caldelas, the Coyote meditate making a stand or resisting the enemy; although he had not the remotest idea what the object of the Texans was, or what had caused the raid. Little time had he, however, to speculate upon the startling interruption to his proposed plans.

Action was the order of the moment.

But, even when making sure of the safety of his captives, the mind of the bandit chief had been filled with the most furious rage, and a thirst for revenge.

He hated the Texans with a most bitter hatred, which, previous to the disaster he had met with that night, it had seemed to him impossible to be increased; but the defeat of his cherished plan, so long projected, and so near being successfully carried out, made him almost insane with fury. Had he been less so, he might have seen that it was in his power to prevent the Texans from making an immediate pursuit, by a rush to the door, closing the same, and thus gaining considerable time.

But this was not thought of. Out went the bandit horde with the captives in their midst, and sped toward the Rio Concha.

The bottom-timber was dark in the extreme, and this caused a plan to occur to Caldelas, by which he might outwit his pursuers. For pursuit he well knew would follow the departure of himself and band.

His belief was that the rancheros had left their horses in the rear of the *hacienda*, and that they would at once make their way to the animals. They would then speed on his trail.

He knew that his band could be seen by the Texans for some distance, and he calculated to a nicety about the time which might naturally be supposed to elapse before the pursuers could reach the plain to the south. He would, then, make for the timber forthwith, and allow the Texans to pass south, when he would return to the *hacienda*. This would afford him a safe refuge, for well he knew the people of Presidio del Norte would think twice before molesting him or his followers.

It was, therefore, just as Little Lone Star had shrewdly suspected. The bandits were in the dark shades of the Concha timber when the rancheros rode past.

No sooner had these disappeared in the gloom, than Caldelas ordered his band to keep to the timber, and return in as stealthy a manner as was possible to the *hacienda*, entering by the gardens in the rear to avoid being seen by any who might have been left behind to guard the dwelling and its contents.

An hour after his hurried exit, the bandit chief was again in the courtyard.

The gates were at once barred, the wounded removed into the dwelling, and the dead to the gardens. Soon something like order was brought out of chaos and death.

Anita was securely locked within her apartment, and Don Juan as well; neither of them having been permitted to speak with the other. Much to the surprise and anger of Caldelas, Padre Jose was not to be found, neither had any of his men seen Francesca.

The old lady had vanished at the time of the Texan attack, and this was not considered strange, or of any importance; but the *pai're* had been in the midst of the band during the gallop over the plain, and had been noticed in the band just before they arrived, on their return. Yet he was not to be seen, or heard of, in the *hacienda*.

The gardens, too, were searched for him, but the search proved fruitless.

The priest was a most important personage, at this particular time, to Caldelas, the Coyote; and he cursed like a pirate, when no trace of the delinquent could be found.

Guards were stationed on the roof, and around the walls; and the horses, all of which had been led into the court for safety, were furnished with water and corn.

The house servants were, as a matter of course, greatly terrified; and, upon the return of the outlaws so unexpectedly, had given themselves up for lost. But Caldelas informed them that, if they provided food for himself and men, and remained in the kitchen, he would spare their lives. To make assurance doubly sure, a guard was placed over them; it being important that they kept their promise.

Cadelas, the Coyote, had placed himself in a very bad position with his followers, when he had ordered Don Juan de Casas to be suspended by the neck, before the eyes of his daughter.

Treacherous and depraved though they were, and hating the haughty Castilians who lorded it over them, these swarthy outlaws had a great respect notwithstanding for the titled and wealthy. Besides, they believed that death by the rope barbed the gates of heaven. And then, the idea of hanging the father in the presence of his daughter—and she, one whose beauty and daring had filled them with admiration—was shocking to them.

Yet, they stood in great dread of the anger of their chief, knowing but too well, that instant death would follow the least hesitation in obeying his orders.

The belief that Caldelas would forfeit the good luck that had always attended him, by this attempted hanging of the old Don, was strong in every breast; and the fierce volley of the Texans was looked upon by them, as a proof that disaster was not only coming, but had already come upon them.

The dreaded Texan yell struck terror to the hearts of all, and the mystery of the matter—the unaccountable presence of the Texans on the roof—was fairly dumbfounding. But their fright caused them to believe that their only hope was in their crafty commander. Had not this been the case, Caldelas would have found himself in command of but few of his followers.

All felt positive that the Texans would pursue them, and it was every way best to keep together, and trust in Caldelas to run them through in safety. So, when he ordered them into the shades, and they saw the terrible Texans speed past their covert, their confidence in Caldelas grew stronger, and their belief that his good luck had left him was partly banished.

The mystery in connection with the presence of the raiders on the roof was cleared up or explained, by the bandit, who had been left to guard the garden gate, being discovered. The manner in which they had gained such an advantageous position was made plain, but why such a party of Texans should be on Mexican territory, at that particular time, was a puzzle.

It was as enigmatical to Caldelas, as to any among his followers. It seemed to indicate that they had known of the coming of the bandits, and the time of their arrival.

Cadelas, after partaking of some refreshments, seated himself, and began to ponder upon the perplexing subject.

He could not bring himself to believe that Padre Jose had betrayed him, for the latter had faithfully followed his instructions up to the time of the attack. Yet, the priest, possibly out of cowardice, appeared to have deserted him. This he could not account for, any more than he could for the presence of the Texans at that juncture.

At last, he sprung to his feet. His repulsive face was filled with fury. Through his mind there had suddenly flashed a solution of the mystery.

He had captured Anita, when she was upon her pony, just at the garden gate—she having, as he had then believed, been to Presidio del Norte for help, to rescue her father. He had, he felt, been wrong in this.

Anita had, on that night ride, been across to the Texan side of the river, and, through some friend, had succeeded in getting a crowd of rancheros to enter Mexico, for the purpose of rescuing Don Juan.

They had met, and had ridden to the *hacienda*, expecting Anita to welcome them; but, having found the gates open, and one of his followers on guard, had captured the man. Then, suspecting that something was wrong, they had crept in, and, seeing what was going on in the court, had got upon the roof in time to frustrate his plan of gaining Anita as his wife.

This was the only reasonable manner in which Caldelas could account for the presence of the attacking party, for he had captured, and confined safely in his stronghold, all the *pones* in both the Don's and the priest's party. None of these, he felt sure, had escaped. And, even had they, it would have been impossible for them to have gone to Texas for help.

The outlaw chief was as furious as a wounded panther. His hatred for the Texans was aroused to a murderous degree, and it filled him with jealous madness; for, he had strong suspicions that Anita had a Texan lover. This seemed but too probable; for, unless such was the case, she would not have been enabled to raise such a force.

These suspicions soon became convictions.

Cadelas decided that he had acted in the best manner possible for furthering his plans, by returning to the *hacienda*. Indeed, he felt positive that, had he continued his retreat, the fresher and harder horses of the Texans would have enabled them to have overtaken him, when there would have been no mercy extended to him or his.

He had already received a promised pardon, and rank as well, from a revolutionist, who would undoubtedly soon be in power; the opposing party being largely in the majority. He had promised Padre Jose a large sum of money for forwarding his schemes in regard to Anita. He had sworn that Don Juan and his sister should die, and so the vast estates would come to him with his wife.

And he would keep that on'!

Nothing human should prevent him.

The Texans had gone on a fool's errand, and he was in possession of Hacienda del Concha. Thus far, he had been fortunate.

The priest and Francesca were missing, but would no doubt turn up in good time.

But, as for what he called the treachery of Anita, in calling upon the Texans for help, this rankled in the breast of Caldelas; and he vowed that he would compel her to confess it, sooner or later.

He would then ascertain who this friend or lover of hers was, and would hunt him to death, even though he might be forced to invade Texan territory to accomplish his purpose.

CHAPTER XVI.

A PRIESTLY GUIDE.

As for Padre Jose, he had, to give him his just dues, been forced by circumstances into becoming a

confederate and tool of Caldelas, the Coyote, for, when accompanying an escort of lancers, who had been guarding a number of pack-mules carrying Government money, he had been captured by the bandit chief.

All of the lancers had been slain, and the priest taken to the mountains, and placed in a cave from which escape was impossible.

Cadelas had told the *padre* he would keep him captive a long time, unless he would swear to obey orders. In that case he might have his liberty at any moment.

He then spoke of the projected revolution, of the pardon and promise of high rank held out to him, in which case he would want a beautiful, rich and titled wife.

He had determined, he said, that the daughter of Don Juan de Casas should be thus honored, and he wished the priest to go to the *hacienda*, gain the friendship of the Don and his daughter, and there remain until the time should come for him to officiate at the marriage of his captor and the beautiful Anita de Casas.

Not only was Padre Jose to have his liberty, but a large sum of money would be given him when this had been brought about.

He said nothing to the priest, however, of his intention to put the Don and Francesca out of the way, for he was by no means sure that Padre Jose would go that far.

The cowardly *padre*, on thinking it over, concluded that she might go further and fare worse than become the wife of this powerful bandit captain, who was, besides, about to become an honored citizen. He would, therefore, be doing no wrong to Anita.

He agreed, accordingly, to do everything in his power to aid Caldelas on these conditions, and promised to obey the orders necessary to the success of the project at once. This he had done, making Hacienda del Concha his home, with results as related.

But be it known that, when Padre Jose saw the old Don so outraged by having a rope knotted around his neck, his better nature was aroused. He regretted having entered into the base compact, and resolved that he would do all that lay in his power to defeat the scheme.

The priest, however, was placed in a most dangerous position, as he could not but see; for he feared the Texans would capture and slay all the bandits, himself included, as they must have seen that he was there to perform the marriage ceremony between the chief of the cutlaws and the daughter of Don Juan.

Even his sacred calling, he felt, would be no protection. They would have no mercy.

He must, if possible, escape; and he resolved that he would do so on the first opportunity that offered.

He had been so greatly demoralized by the sight of the dead and the groans of the wounded, as well as the fear of death to himself, that he had not had wits enough about him to plan an escape. Indeed, he must have acted in a cunning manner to have effected it from the watchful bandit chief.

However, before again reaching his old shelter, after Caldelas had ordered a return, Padre Jose had succeeded in slipping away from the outlaws and secreting himself in a thicket which was as dark as Erebus.

The complete revulsion in the priest's feelings toward Caldelas surprised himself, but the outrageous conduct of the chief had been of such a nature as to cause even his oldest followers to rebel against him in their hearts. Of course Padre Jose knew that the intention of Caldelas was to establish himself within the walls of Hacienda del Concha, where he no doubt purposed to carry out his plans which had been interrupted by the Texans; that is, in making Anita his wife by compulsion.

The *padre* was aware that when Caldelas discovered his absence he would be furious and would institute a search, which, if not successful—and he vowed it should not be—the bandit might then murder the Don, and hasten with Anita to his retreat in the Chihuahua mountains.

Padre Jose felt positive that the main object which Caldelas had, in returning to the *hacienda* was to proceed with his plans, and when he found this impossible on account of the priest's absence, he would evacuate at once. He would then, it was probable, gallop on the east side of the Rio Concha, to avoid being seen by the Texans.

But, no matter how it was to end, the *padre* was now determined to break faith with the perfidious outlaw; and yet, did he not succeed in saving Anita from the awful fate that threatened her, he felt that he would be personally responsible for her sufferings and her terrible fate.

He decided upon immediate action.

Alone, he was helpless; but he would go at once to Presidio del Norte, and call upon the men of that town to rescue the maiden and her father, and to punish Caldelas, the Coyote, as he deserved. But, upon reflection, he concluded that, perhaps, before he reached the town which was three miles distant, Anita might be lost forever, and Hacienda del Concha sacked and burned.

This probability was torturing, for the position of affairs called for instant interference.

The *padre* had lain for some time secreted in the thicket, puzzled what move to make; when suddenly he became aware of the approach of a body of horsemen. These were going down-stream, toward the *hacienda*; evidently following the same course that had been pursued by Caldelas and his band.

At once he saw that the fox had been outwitted, and the hounds were hot on the trail; although that trail was invisible on account of the darkness. Or, in other words, the Texans had "tumbled"—as they

would have said—to the game of the bandits, and were in hot pursuit.

The presence of this party was as much of a riddle to Padre Jose as to Caldelas; and he was not a little afraid of them.

But he was more afraid of the consequences to Anita in delaying her rescue; and he made up his mind to attract their attention, trusting that he could convince them he was not in league with the outlaws.

He therefore rustled a bush as the foremost riders came abreast of his position, and called out in a guarded tone:

"Halt, friends, and harm me not!"

The sharp click of rifle-locks sounded in the shades, preceded by a low whistle; and then silence reigned, for every horse had halted.

"Friends," continued the priest, "do not shoot me! I am a son of the church, and not a man of war. I would confer with you. You are Texans, are you not, and in pursuit of Caldelas, the Coyote?"

"Yes. But speak quickly, and to the point," returned Little Lone Star, sharply and suspiciously. "We have you covered, and, at the first sign of treachery, will riddle that thicket with bullets!"

"Speak, I say! Are the bandits in the *hacienda*? And how came you here, a priest, as you say you are? Are you the one, who was ready a short time ago, to perform the marriage rite for Caldelas?"

"He and his band are there by this time," answered the *patre*, trembling. "I escaped from him in the darkness. Yes, I am the priest whom he would have compelled to perform the marriage ceremony, but for your timely arrival. I do beg and pray you to rescue Don Juan de Casas and his daughter, and to shoot or hang Caldelas, the Coyote; but you will have to act with secrecy and great caution, or he may slay his captives should he see you."

"I was about to ride fast, to get aid from Presidio del Norte, and I will now do so; for you may not have men enough to cope with them. But, I am under your orders, and will do what you advise."

"Good enough!" returned the young ranchero. "You talk square. We'll do as you advise. Indeed, it is what we already thought of. Am I right, pard?"

Ejaculations of approval were heard.

"It is only by secretly gaining entrance to the *casa*, that we can hope to save the Don and his family. If we succeed in this, then woe to Caldelas and his men!"

"You had better remain with us, *patre*; for we do not need any assistance from the men of Presidio del Norte, and they might turn against us, and help the outlaws. You may be of use in helping us to gain an entrance. Do you know the place well?"

"I have lived there for many months. Indeed it is my home. I may be of service in the way you say, but if Caldelas captures me, I am lost. I am Padre Jose."

"Mount, and lead the way then, Padre Jose! We'll insure you against capture. Come! There is no time to lose. Lead on!"

"I'll do so, and at once."

"Blast my butes!" muttered Pecos Pete. "Hit's ormighty lucky we-uns struck that gospel-slinger, but it war mighty nigh bein' onlucky fer him. My finger war crooked 'cross trigger, an' pressin' purty tight, afore he slung lingo that proved him square. Break my bones, ef we-uns don't corral the cussed coyote this time, boyees, an' not 'low him ter crawl back ter his hole!"

"Hush, Pete!" warned Little Lone Star, in a whisper; "we can't be too cautious."

By this time Padre Jose was mounted, and urging his mule in front of the horses of Pete and his young pard. He then, with more words of warning led the way toward the *hacienda*, knowing well that the rifles of the Texans still remained ready for instant use against the bandits, and himself as well, did he act in any manner that would cause suspicion of treachery.

On through the dark shades went the band of Texans, the undergrowth becoming less and less thick, and soon they reached the promenade in the rear of the garden wall, when all dismounted.

They then secreted their horses in the thickets, and in a few minutes more, some twenty well armed and determined Texans gathered around their boyish leader, Little Lone Star, beside whom stood Pecos Pete and Padre Jose. The expression on the face of each told the same story—"Theirs but to do or die," if need be.

Not fifty yards from where they thus halted, was Hacienda del Concha, into which all were resolved soon to be.

CHAPTER XVII.

OUT OF THE HURLY BURLY.

LITTLE LONE STAR and his followers were unanimous in deciding that their only way of proceeding must be in the most secret manner, and systematically at that.

First and foremost, Anita and her father must be rescued at all hazards; but this was no easy task. Indeed, it seemed impossible.

Upon arriving at the promenades in the gloom and shadows, they secured their horses, and all the Texans gathered in a body around their leader and Pecos Pete. All were intensely anxious in regard to the safety of Anita, the beauty and daring of whom had won all hearts. They were filled, also, with contempt and hatred for the dastardly bandit chief.

And, besides, every man of them deeply sympathised with Little Lone Star, knowing how he must feel while the life of the poor girl who had sped to him for aid in her peril, was now threatened. They were more than ready to answer her call, to save herself and her father. They were, they felt, in a

great measure responsible for her safety, and of all of Don Juan's property as well.

The chivalry of their natures had been aroused, and as deeply so had been their desire for revenge on the Coyote.

But they could not linger in consulting at length in regard to the manner in which the rescue should be attempted, for it was now near daylight, and every moment that they wasted would lessen their chances of success.

The darkness greatly favored their movements.

But a few words, and they guarded ones, were spoken by Little Lone Star. He had hit upon the only plan that seemed in the least promising, and he now gave his orders:

"Surround the ranch, pards, and locate the stations of all the bandit sentinels! Be ready, at the first alarm from inside the house, to pounce upon them, and wipe them out. Then strive to scale the walls, or to burst in the gate, or rear door.

"Pete and I will get upon the roof, and endeavor to make our way to where the captives are confined. If possible, we will rescue them without raising an alarm; but, if not, you will hear our revolvers.

"We'll make them pay dear for this raid, but our work must be done before the day breaks. Wilkins, old pard, will you accompany Padre Jose? You will have the charge of the lariat, upon which Pete's life and mine must depend, while we scale the wall. We'll try and lower the captives to you.

"Scatter, scouts of the Cibolo, and surround the *hacienda*! Follow my instructions. Caution and strategy are the words.

"Come on, pard Pete; and you, Wilkins, and Padre Jose! Slow and sure be our pass-word—rescue or death, our war-cry!"

With these words, Little Lone Star and Pecos Pete by his side, the priest and Wilkins following, stalked away in the darkness.

The band, then, stole to the right and left, half-bent; approaching the walls, to ferret out the stations of the bandit sentinels.

Pete felt positive that the Greaser, who had been on guard when they had first reached the gates, and whom they had bound and gagged, had by this time been released. It was probable that another had been stationed in his place, as it was an important position.

He and his young pard, therefore, stole forward to reconnoiter. Their movements were as stealthy as those of an Apache on the war-trail. The signals, that passed between them, could not have been heard five paces from them.

Each knew what the other expected of him.

The sentinel leaned against a tree, and Little Lone Star made his way to the opposite side of it. The next moment, both of the young Texan's arms were around the trunk and his hands were on the mouth and throat of the bandit. Then Pecos Pete sprung forward, and buried his blade in the Greaser's breast.

Scarce a sound had been made.

A hiss from Little Lone Star brought the priest and Wilkins forward. Then the four proceeded to the gate, which was closed, but not locked. They entered, and made their way, through the shrubbery, to the rear wall.

They felt positive that guards were stationed on the roof, but did not believe there would be many by the rear gates.

Crawling up, directly under the water-spouts, they cast two lassoes upward. The cast was successful. A noose was thus drawn tightly around two of the spouts, and the determined pair, with bowies held between their teeth, began climbing upward. They soon gained a footing. Listening intently, they were not long in locating the position of several of the outlaws by the low conversation.

A collection of flowering shrubs hid them from view. Thus far they were favored.

Their decision was soon made and acted upon. They both knew the location of the sky light, which was in the center of the roof, and at once they crept toward it.

The shrubs were taken advantage of, and in a very short space of time, Little Lone Star and Pecos Pete were within the *casa*. And their arrival was opportune.

But we must return to Anita.

The horror which the poor maiden had been called upon to pass through had been more than even she could bear.

She could only feel that she was doomed, to a certainty, to a fate she dared not even think of. A deathly faintness came over her.

Then she heard the report of many Texan rifles, a signal of hope where none had existed, and also a signal that proved to her that her Texan lover was faithful. She opened her eyes and was astounded at the marvelous transformation that had taken place.

Cadelas supported her with his arm, and she could see that his amazement was little less than her own. Then her gaze lighted upon her father, as he lay upon the ground where he had fallen when the rope had been shot apart. Was he alive or dead?

Dead and dying bandits lay here and there, and the extinguished torches had left the court greatly darkened. Then came the rush, with the mad yells, the groans and cries, and the snorting and plunging of steeds; and then, in the darkness, Anita found herself bound upon a mustang and being borne away through the night from her home—away, as she knew, southward, toward the haunts of Caldelas the Coyote!

Yet, she was somewhat consoled when she saw, although dimly, the erect form of her father, who was secured, like herself, to a horse, but evidently not having suffered materially from the rough treat-

ment of the outlaws. There was still hope. Little Lone Star with his gallant followers might pursue the bandits and rescue her and her father.

But as the swarthy horde sped on over the dark plain and there was no sign of the Texans following, this hope became less and less. The rancheros had arrived just in time to prevent the forced marriage between herself and the vile Caldelas, but it would seem the hideous ceremony had been only delayed, for they were now hastening, it was evident, to the bandits' stronghold. Was there no help for her?

Surely Little Lone Star had not deserted her!

Soon the outlaw horde, at an order from their captain, dashed into the dark bottom-timber of the Rio Concha. Just on the margin of the shades they halted, when Anita was gagged, as was also her father.

It was at that moment the poor girl beheld the Texans speeding over the plain, and approaching—as she thought, the covert of the outlaws; but soon, to her anguish, they dashed southward, and Caldelas, with his cut-throats, turned down the river, and backward in the direction of the *hacienda*.

Anita could see the cunning in this.

Cadelas, the Coyote, had outwitted the Texans!

Little Lone Star and his pards were riding toward the Chihuahua Mountains, bent on her rescue, but she was being borne back to her home and her fate!

Had the kind Fates deserted her?

When, shortly afterward, she found herself locked in her own chamber, not the least spark of hope remained in her breast.

The Texans would not be able to discern the trail of the bandits in the darkness.

They were now speeding toward the haunts of Caldelas, believing that the latter had made a hasty flight to the Chihuahua Mountains.

She lay upon her couch, shuddering. Her blood chilled at the slightest sound. She longed for the companionship of her aunt, but poor Francesca was missing.

Anita was at length in desperation. She had not even her stiletto this time, or the consequences need not be even hinted at.

She looked for, every moment, a visit from the monster that had no mercy.

Where was her father?

Had the outlaws ill-treated him?

From such a train of thought she was aroused by the grating of a key in the lock of her door. She seemed turning to ice.

Springing from her couch she stood, a picture of beauty and terror.

The door opened and Caldelas, the Coyote, strode into the apartment.

His brutal face was red with much wine, his black eyes glittered like those of a serpent, having in them such an expression of triumph that Anita was terrified. She uttered a shriek of despair.

That piercing cry was echoed by the Texan yell from Little Lone Star, who sprung into the room, his bowie brightly flashing in the candle-light, and his handsome face disfigured with rage.

His rush was headlong. Two bounds placed him between Caldelas and Anita, the latter falling backward upon the couch in the reaction from her fear and horror. The next moment the bandit-chief, with a cry of baffled fury, fell forward upon the floor, the blood flowing from a deep knife-thrust.

Meanwhile, there were sounds of a fearful struggle just outside the door, which had begun an instant after Little Lone Star had darted inside; and as Caldelas fell. Pecos Pete bounded across the threshold, shouting:

"Come on, leetle pard, er they'll corral us fer keeps! I'm O.K. until yit. I've got ther Don, an' I've laid out two yaller-skins, but thar's enough left fer chaw us up. Bully fer yeou! You've got ther gal, an' slashed ther old Coyote.

"But, come on, er we-uns 'll be slashed inter cat-fish-bait! Whoop-er-ee! I'm hyer, all o'me—Pecos Pete! Cl'ar ther way, er down goes yer meat-house!"

Little Lone Star knew there was not an instant to lose. The whole building rung with shouts of alarm.

Catching up Anita, and still holding his revolver in his right hand, he dashed from the apartment; believing that he was leaving Caldelas dying, but having no time to make sure of this, Pete, with Don Juan de Casas ran on ahead; and soon they were all up the stairs and on the roof. There they were confronted by a half dozen bandits, but who could not at once distinguish whether they were friends or foes. Almost instantly three of these were shot down, the others rushing to the further end of the roof.

Below, the Texans had rushed upon the guards, and slain them before they had comprehended their danger; and in a minute or two more the huge gates had been battered down.

Little Lone Star and Pete hurried the Don and Anita to that point on the roof at which they had made their ascent; and soon lowered their charges to Wilkins and Padre Jose.

As the latter hurried them from the garden a cry from one of the hammocks revealed the presence of Francesca, who had fled thither for safety, and cried and moaned herself into a sleep of exhaustion.

Anita rushed to her aunt, and together they hung upon the neck of Don Juan; the *patre*, after he had made some explanations, being treated more as a friend than previously.

Little Lone Star and Pecos Pete lingered not with the rejoicing group, however, but both dashed at once on their return to the *casa*, from whence loud yells from the rancheros and cries of terror from the Greasers sounded.

These were mingled with other sounds that were most suggestive—namely, the scattering reports of revolvers and *escopetas*.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CIRCUMSTANCES ALTER CASES.

SPURTS of fire flashed all around the door and gate in the darkness, and from the roof of the building, and Little Lone Star and Pecos Pete, after making sure of the safety of those they had rescued, at once bethought themselves of Caldelas the Coyote, whom they had been forced to leave where he had fallen, and that without having ascertained whether he had received a mortal wound.

They both felt quite anxious on this account, for while Caldelas lived, there would be danger to all who had been concerned in balking him, and he might yet raise another band of marauders.

They rushed at once to the main gate, where a dozen or more torches lighted up the imposing scene, the Texans being shielded by the walls of the court from the bullets of the bandits. As their young and gallant leader appeared hurrying toward them, the rancheros gave a yell of relief, and the next moment a huge piece of timber was hurled with great force against the main gate.

It seemed as though the knowledge that their two leaders were safe, which also implied the rescue of the captives, had given to the attacking party a double strength; for the huge gate was crashed inward, and fell with a terrific sound on the hard flooring of the court-yard. Then there was another wild and triumphant yell, and led by Little Lone Star, all dashed into the court, casting keen glances in every direction, and making sure that none of the bandits were hiding themselves in the shadows.

With torches in their left and revolvers in their right hands, on charged the victorious rancheros.

"Guard all the doors, pard's!" yelled Little Lone Star, as he dashed forward, followed by Pecos Pete.

Both made their way at once to the room in which Caldelas had been left, apparently dying. The Coyote, dead or alive, had disappeared. Then followed a search of all the apartments, but without success.

By this time the party of Texans in the rear had burst in the door.

"Back, pard's, and guard the walls!" was the order of Little Lone Star. "I know the bandits are getting down by lariats."

With whoops of rage they rushed to obey, but a few followed the daring pair to the roof. There the outlaws who remained were letting themselves down from the water-spouts, as Little Lone Star had guessed.

Some sprung off the walls at the risk of broken limbs; others, hanging on lariats, slipped down, burning their hands with the friction in their quick descent.

The Texans rushed around the corner of the building, and a rattling discharge of revolvers followed, from them and from the roof above them, upon the survivors of the band of Caldelas, the Coyote. Not one was permitted to escape, for the mad rage of the rancheros, who still bore in mind that fearful scene in the courtyard, and the perfidy of the outlaws, was beyond control.

The fight was ended, the captives rescued, and the bandit horde annihilated, but their leader was nowhere to be found.

Cadelas, if living, had escaped; if dead, his corpse had been spirited away.

Few, if any, of the Texans believed the outlaw chief to have been killed. There was, therefore, much concern in regard to the safety of the ladies and Don Juan de Casas.

Little Lone Star directed the dead to be removed, and the dwelling put in order. This done, he whispered to Pecos Pete, and the two pards started toward the spot where they had left Anita and her friends; for they feared that Caldelas, if he still lived, might discover them, and murder them all.

Scarcely had they gone half the distance, when cries of horror from female lips came from the timber shades, and the pair redoubled their exertions to gain the point whence the sounds proceeded. Soon, panting for breath, they tore through the thicket, and burst in upon a change of scene.

By this time it had become much lighter, for the day was breaking.

Dashing into the clear space where the hammocks hung, they saw upon the ground Padre Jose and Don Juan, both bleeding from knife-wounds. Francesca lay senseless, having apparently fainted. But scarce a glance did the pards cast at these, for just darting from the "open," they beheld Caldelas, the Coyote, bearing Anita in his arms!

The maiden caught sight of Little Lone Star, and perhaps that saved her from an awful fate, for it would have been an easy matter for Caldelas to have eluded pursuit and concealed himself in the thickets.

As it was, the sight of her lover gave to her the power of speech; and she shrieked and clutched a strong sapling with both her hands. This unexpected act caused the bandit to whirl half around, just as the Texan yell burst from his two pursuers and they bounded toward him.

Cadelas perceived his danger. He released his hold and darted toward the great lagoon. Had there been time, he would doubtless have plunged a knife into the heart of his captive, rather than she should fall into the hands of the hated Texan youth, who he then knew must be the lover of Anita de Casas.

Little Lone Star stopped to catch the girl in his arms; but Pecos Pete halted not. He ran onward, in pursuit of the fleeing outlaw.

The dark waters of the lagoon were before him, and Caldelas, without hesitation, gave a flying leap, which with the momentum he had gained by rapid flight, sent him far out, over the waters. Down,

into them, he plunged, and strove to swim beneath the surface, as far as was possible, toward the opposite bank.

But the man in chase was not one to be thus foiled, and Pecos Pete leaped fully as far out from the bank, and into the lagoon; soon clutching the bandit leader by his long hair. Then came a desperate struggle.

This ended in Pete's dragging his bruised and senseless antagonist up the bank, where he sat, until he had somewhat recovered from his exertions and fatigue.

"Bu'st my buttons!" he panted; "ef I didn't corral ther condemned coyote, after all!"

The cries of Anita had drawn the Texans from the house to the bottom-timber in headlong haste. Little Lone Star directed that the Don and Padre Jose be at once removed, and their wounds attended to. He also requested several of his pards to hasten to the assistance of Pecos Pete.

Anita was supported, by the young ranchero, to her apartment, where she was attended shortly after by her aunt who had by that time recovered from her faint.

A horseman was at once dispatched to Presidio del Norte, to obtain the services of a native physician, and also to give information of what had happened during the night at Hacienda del Concha.

Neither Don Juan nor the priest was, however, seriously wounded. But some of the Texans had been badly hurt, and four poor fellows lay stark and senseless.

All in all, it had been a most successful expedition, resulting in the rescue of the captives, the slaying of nearly, if not quite all of the outlaws who had accompanied Caldelas on his disastrous raid, and the capture of the bandit chief himself.

It was when Pecos Pete and others appeared, bearing the vanquished leader between them, that the victorious party became really exultant. Caldelas was bound securely, and shut into a room from which escape or rescue was impossible, and then all, except a few who volunteered to stay guard, threw themselves upon their blankets in the shade of the gardens, where it was cool, and the air was fragrant with the perfume of numberless flowers.

There they soon fell asleep.

Both Don Juan and Padre Jose were suffering greatly, but they were most thankful to the saints, and the Texans, for their lives.

No longer could the Don harbor hatred toward the men of the Lone Star State. Just the opposite, for he felt toward them the highest regard and esteem, vowing that they had proved themselves his best friends, having saved him from death, and his daughter from a fate that was infinitely worse.

When the priest had explained everything, his patron forgave him, promising that he should receive the same amount guaranteed him by Caldelas when it came his turn to officiate at the marriage of Anita in a more conventional way.

The Don declared that whenever that ceremony might take place, his daughter might make her own choice of the bridegroom, for that, for his part, he would not go to Chihuahua, or make another start to that city if she died: n old maid.

Stranger still, when the old gentleman heard the Texans couple his daughter's name with that of Little Lone Star, he manifested no displeasure, for he evidently felt that the young, brave, and daring youth from beyond the Bravo had more than earned Anita for his wife.

CHAPTER XIX.

PARADISE IN PRESIDIO.

THERE is little more to be told.

The bright sun had reached meridian before our friends awoke for their refreshing slumbers. When they did so, they found nearly the entire population of Presidio del Norte were around the *hacienda*, all being astounded with the occurrences of the previous night, as detailed to them and conclusively proved by the smashed gates and the bodies of the bandits.

There was great rejoicing at the safety of the Don and his family, the Texans all being showered with thanks and blessings when all that they had achieved became known.

That the long-feared bandit horde had been broken up, the notorious Caldelas being a captive and doomed to die by the rope—this was a source of the greatest relief and joy to all—even to those who had in a secret way been connected with the outlaws, for they had been forced to favor Caldelas through fear of his vengeance, and were rejoiced that such slavery was now at an end.

But who could portray the happiness of Little Lone Star and Anita when, after all the startling and agonizing events since their first meeting, they now met, refreshed physically by slumber and relieved in mind by the fortunate ending of all their dread anxiety and terror?

And their relief and joy were increased tenfold when they were both summoned by Don Juan to his bedside, and there told that it was his wish they should become man and wife as soon as he and Padre Jose had recovered sufficiently to take part in the interesting ceremony.

They were both astonished as much as they were rejoiced. And they felt that to Pecos Pete they owed much of their happiness, for the old scout had informed the Don and the priest of the visit of Anita to the Texan ranch, to beg the assistance of Little Lone Star and his pards to cross the Rio Grande to the rescue of her father.

He had also told of Anita's having been saved by Little Lone Star, when she had been floating, while asleep, to her death at Babbit's Falls, which had been the first meeting of the youthful pair, and during which each had fallen in love with the other, had

confessed that love, and resolved that they would never be parted by human agency. To this Pete was positive they would have adhered, and all who knew them would have felt disposed to agree with him in this opinion.

Padre Jose was grateful to his stars, and every other celestial auxiliary, for having so narrowly escaped from the power of the bandit chief; and he made a solemn vow to remain with, and be the firm friend and ally of, Don Juan de Casas.

The capital sentence was soon carried out upon Caldelas, the Coyote, and his body, with those of his fallen comrades, was cremated by the people of Presidio del Norte, who had so long suffered from their predations.

Don Juan sent the Texans to the stronghold of Caldelas, the *poder* giving them directions by which they found the caverns, slew the bandit guards, and released the overjoyed *pardos*—the Don giving each member of the rescuing party a hundred pesos and twenty horses for this service, and ordering a big barbecue to be given to his friends generally on the day set for the bull-fight.

That was also to be the wedding-day of Anita and Little Lone Star.

But the most surprising announcement of all was yet to come; and a startling surprise it was to all.

On the same day, the Señorita Francesca had promised Pecos Pete to unite her fortunes with his in a life partnership, which as she still was a handsome woman, and Old Pete—according to his own estimate of himself—was as homely as "an old rawhide," appeared to be a great sacrifice on the part of that respectable middle-aged Mexican lady. But, probably, Francesca's opinion of Don Pedro was a more flattering one.

As for Pete, when he had proposed and been accepted, he immediately samped out on the prairie alone, and with yells that would have made a Comanche envious, executed a regular jubilee dance during which he fulfilled to the letter the vow he made mentally, previous to proposing to Francesca. This was, that "ef she 'grees ter pard with me, I'll bu'st my buttons, dead sure!"

During the few days that intervened before the bull-fight so long looked forward to with such pleasure and bright anticipations by Anita, the injuries of her father and Padre Jose were nearly recovered from, and they were delighted at the thought of being able to attend.

Anita had had little thought on the days that preceded her first meeting with Little Lone Star, of the real happiness that would be hers on that occasion; indeed, it was to her more like a pleasant dream than aught else, for there were times when neither she nor her lover could credit their own senses.

Many happy hours did the youthful pair pass at the paternal dwelling, while Pecos Pete also remained on the Mexican side of the river the greater portion of the time.

Don Juan de Casas did not lose sight of the fact that some of the brave Texans had lost their lives in the service of himself and daughter. He caused a large herd of cattle and horses to be driven to the surviving relatives, not one being forgotten, and every man who had been wounded receiving special recognition.

The eventful day soon arrived.

Every one, in gala dress a' that, was in attendance at the bull-fight in Presidio del Norte—the Texans occupying seats of honor, on each side of Don Juan.

Anita was escorted by Little Lone Star, while Pecos Pete had taken Francesca in tow, but with an awkwardness that was ludicrous.

The bull-fight was a remarkable success, but failed to receive as much mention as did the imposing marriage ceremony that followed within the walls of the little *adobe* church. From this, William Wadron and Anita de Casas went away as man and wife, as did also Pecos Pete and Francesca, as happy in their own way.

Then came the barbecue, where oxen were roasted whole, as well as sheep, deer, antelopes and hogs, when all feasted to their hearts' content. After this, a grand reception and dance was held at Hacienda del Concha, all the people of Presidio del Norte attending, the dancing being kept up both in the *casa*, and in the *court*.

The *peones* of the estate were not long in seeing that a great change for the better had come over Don Juan. He treated every one kindly and courteously, and this augured brighter days for them in the future. And thus it proved to be, for, thankful for his almost miraculous preservation, the old Don became more cheerful and charitable.

Pecos Pete was made a rich man, through his marriage, Francesca owning in her own right, an extensive stock of cattle, horses, and sheep. He established himself on the Mexican side, near the estate of his brother-in-law, but on the opposite side of the Rio Concha.

Many a time would he remark to his young pard, now his nephew:

"Bu'st my buttons, ef I ever thorted I'd be a 'high-send-her-dado,' an' all on 'count o' pardin' wi' you!"

The youthful husband and wife, handsome in form and feature as they were lovely and winning in dispositions and manners, were well worth seeing, as they rode many a time side by side over the flower-bespangled prairies of Texas; and these plains were their own, for the marriage portion of Anita enabled her to more than double the lands and herds of her husband.

Don Juan de Casas spent much of his time, as did also Padre Jose, at his daughter's on the Cibolo—the home of the happiest and handsomest couple in Presidio county, Anita and LITTLE LONE STAR.

THE END.

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